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THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

BY

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"West Wind," etc.

WITH NUMEROUS LINE DRAWINGS BY
THE AUTHOR



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To
BARTON CURRIE

WITHOUT WHOM THERE WOULD HAVE
BEEN NO JOURNEY

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREAMBLE	I
CHAPTER	
I. THE MAGIC CARPET	7
II. OAHU	28
III. THE PACIFIC	47
IV. JAPAN	56
V. SOUTHWARD	70
VI. HONGKONG	87
VII. MACAO	97
VIII. COASTWISE	109
IX. COASTWISE (<i>Continued</i>)	115
X. TONKING	123
XI. THE HOUSE OF MARVELS	144
XII. TO YUNNAN-FU	152
XIII. TO HUÉ	175
XIV. HUÉ	187
XV. THE FUNERAL OF A KING	204
XVI. THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS	215
XVII. SAIGON	231
XVIII. NORTHWARD	243
XIX. ANGKOR	258
XX. ANGKOR VAT	267
XXI. A DANCE	283
XXII. WESTWARD	286
XXIII. BANGKOK	303
XXIV. BANGKOK (<i>Continued</i>)	317
XXV. AYUTHIA	325
XXVI. FINIS	340

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

PREAMBLE

I sat lunching sumptuously and heartily in the Ritz Hotel, Piccadilly, London.

I mention this in no exalted spirit—somebody else was paying for it—but it is necessary to get our local colour, and the quicker the brighter.

My companions were the Eminent Man of Letters and the Editor. The former, who chooses his viands almost as nicely as his words, was ordering, the latter paying, while I did most of the eating, a division of labour which suited me down to the ground.

At a table on our right sat a British Cabinet Minister with his lawful wife. He brooded darkly over his plate; the most arrogant mouth in Europe was twisted into a knot. Trouble in dear old India? Moslems knocking Hindus on the head to the glory of Allah? Or ructions in still more expensive old Mesopotamia? Turks splashing over the frontier, annexing (in order of value) camels and ladies? Zaghul Pasha talking through his tarboosh in Cairo and bombs a-popping?—or is it just another Industrial Revolution?

His wife could have told you that none of these things were happening, and if they were would not put one tuck in her Right Honourable's forehead. No, he was wondering what his innards would say to *Lobster Américaine*.



At a table on our left sat an officer of the Horse Guards with two scions of the nobility, one with a strip of plaster across his masterful nose, the other with a raw eye collected in a glove fight with a Wapping pugilist (whom he thrashed) the evening before. They conversed, as strong men should, in monosyllabic grunts, and only between courses.

At my back sat an American musical comedy star with two well-groomed old bucks. I was thankful she was at my back, for her appearance was enough to make any man forsake his good provender for unsubstantial sonnets; yet those two soulless old clods never once (as far as I know) so much as glanced up off their platters. I concluded that they were her uncles and what to me and the general public was our goddess, was to them merely "our Gladys." Still what a waste! How glad the Horse Guard would have been of her bewitching company! How gratified the uncles would have been with the buffeted peers! "When I was lunching t'other day with my friend the Marquis of Blankshire. . . ."

I often wish I were a fairy, especially in restaurants, then I could leap on my chair and wave my little thing-me-jig and shout "General Post!" and wives who were bored rigid with their husbands could trot across and flirt with other people's, and nephews who were yawning their heads off over descriptions of their rich aunts' sciatica, and nieces who were weeping tears of tedium over accounts of their wealthy uncles' gout could flit about and sort themselves agreeably, so that Eton Crop might match with Oxford Bag, as it were, and Sciatica with Puffed Hock.

Nevertheless boredom was not my complaint that day. The Editor was humorous and wise, the Eminent Man of Letters both wise and witty. We talked



PREAMBLE



about Douglas Fairbanks and the quickest way of getting bald. We discussed two divorce cases, and our fancies for the Derby.

All about us the chatter buzzed and droned. All about us people ate and ate. Hebrew financiers with chorus girls. Sleek Rajahs (home on Imperial affairs) with more chorus girls. Communist politicians (off duty) with Conservative peeresses. Royal Academicians who looked like golf professionals. Hungarian virtuosos who looked like pawnbrokers' clerks—and probably had been. Imposing nobodies sat with inconspicuous celebrities under the same ceiling. Fame and nonentity nourished itself with the selfsame food, in the selfsame fashion. A flood of sudden April sunshine poured through the tall windows and set glass and silver twinkling merrily. Our conversation flicked, somehow, across to California, back to Berlin, and halted.

Then the Editor glanced up at me and said quite quietly—as one would say “Pass the salt, please”—“Will you go to Annam for me?”

“Annam!”

“Yes. Know where it is?”

“Sunny side of Indo-China.”

“Oh, down there, is it? Well, what about it?”

“Half a moment,” I said. “Let me catch my breath. I understand that you are proposing to send me to Annam, Indo-China, here and now at your expense. Am I right or has this coffee gone to my head?”

“No, the coffee's in its proper place. Are you on?”

“Of course. When shall I start?”

“Oh, I'll leave that to you. That's fixed, then. Care for a liqueur?”

“Yes, please—three or four.”

That was all. He tossed the order to a waiter and



turned to talk to the Eminent One on the difficulties of approaching the veteran French Impressionist, Claude Monet.

He never mentioned Annam again. Despatching fellows to the ends of the earth was quite an everyday matter with him, seemingly. Some place name took his fancy and he stood a chap a luncheon and wafted him off to see about it. "This Dangerous Archipelago, I see mentioned, sounds attractive. Got an idea where it lives? Oh, down there, is it? Should like to hear something about it. Are you on? Good; that's fixed, then. Care for a liqueur?"

That's all. Lights a cigar and goes quietly on with the next job. But the envoy, what of him? New worlds for him as ever Columbus found. It was a new world for me. I had frizzled in northern snows and sizzled in southern deserts and roughed it down the Pacific Coast, but the Far East I had never seen—or smelt. And now, click! and it was all opening up before me. Magic, no less! Wizardry, the old original stuff, there in the Ritz Grill, Piccadilly, London, in the twentieth century of Our Lord.

I eyed my companion afresh and with sudden revelation. Outwardly he was very much as other men. He was clothed, barbered, booted and haberdashed by self-respecting tradesmen. You would pass him a hundred times, a thousand times, in the street and notice nothing peculiar. Naturally, naturally—it would never do if he tripped about in the time-honoured get-up of his clan, brass earrings, flowing raiment and all; people would think he was the advance agent for a circus with a performing camel round the corner, or touting for a Turkish bath. Naturally he was dressed as other men; one must move with the times. But for all that, I recognized him now; he wouldn't fool *me* any more.



PREAMBLE



He was the lineal descendant of the great family of Arabian Djinns, those useful lads who appeared to fishermen at the wrench of a corkscrew, or to Aladdins at the rubbing of a lamp.

"Step upon my magic carpet, O my son, and I will display unto thee all the countries of the world in the batting of an eye," they used to say—or words to that effect. "Would'st go to Annam on the sunny side of Indo-China? Would'st? Good; that's fixed, then. Hey! Presto! Off we go! Hang on to your hat!"

I saw through him, all right, Fifth Avenue gents' suiting, collar and tie despite. Good old Abdullah the Djinn!

Claude Monet was exceedingly difficult to approach, it appeared from the conversation. Given you stormed the outer guard of housekeepers and relations you still had the old gentleman to reckon with. He had a large garden with plentiful bushes in it, behind which he hid, skipping from one to the other. To blazes with the excellent master! If they were really bent on seeing him, why not hire a balloon and drop directly on him in a parachute? Quite simple.

Annam! What did I know of Annam? Nothing. What does one know of any place till one's seen it? I had met Annamite troops in Morocco, funny little saffron-coloured blokes with slit eyes. And then there was that charmer from Saigon who had presented me with a bouquet in Toulon. Wasn't Saigon in Annam? I hoped it was. She had lovely eyes. . . . Annam! I must speed down to my club and look at a map. I wondered if the hall porter knew anything of Saigon: he was supposed to know everything.

We reclaimed our hats and sticks, meandered out into the hall and parted. The Eminent One betook himself east to a directors' meeting, the Djinn south to



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



find his wife (they have family lives like other people, it appears, these Djinns).

I stood on the steps undecided. I had sworn to attend a private view in Bond Street . . . but there was that map. . . .

Up and down Piccadilly the traffic poured, red buses, white buses, bright with advertisements, blue limousines, yellow limousines, brown touring cars and grey, taxis and vans, all streaming east and west as if swept on inexorable floods. Rain fell, a momentary down-pour striking slantwise across the sun. The sunlight glittered on the rain, turning it into a shower of glancing golden darts.

But I saw these things only superficially. My mind's eye was far, far away. . . . Tiled pagoda roofs rising through the fiery scarlet of flamboyant blossom . . . brown junk sails beating seaward through fantastic islets. I heard not the blare of motor horns or the rumble of traffic, but the distant tinkle of temple bells. . . . Annam! Annam! . . . Well, a swear was a swear and they might have an atlas at that gallery.

I sprang off the steps to the pavement, hitting a man with my chest and nearly butting him under an omnibus.

"Where the devil d'you think you're going?" he snarled.

"Annam," said I, cheerfully. "Good-bye!"

CHAPTER I

THE MAGIC CARPET

I lately edited the journal of an eighteenth century seaman who spent many years driving a trading brig to and fro between the United States and Europe. Hardly a day of his long voyages (on one occasion he was 119 days getting from Liverpool to New York) passed without he met with one vessel, sometimes two or three. Almost invariably he spoke the stranger, frequently he hove his boat over and went aboard and dined—out in mid-ocean, a thousand miles from anywhere. The North Atlantic seems to have been a sociable spot in those days. In these days, when the populations of the United States and Great Britain have swollen by scores of millions and the traffic between the two increased proportionately, one fares from side to side in almost complete isolation. The solution is of course the increase of tonnage; what a century since took twenty small wind-jammers to carry is now borne on one huge steel bottom. If ships get even bigger, as they will, we shall be passing to and fro without sighting a single companionable hull, the sea will regain its ancient loneliness and we shall know the solitude Columbus and Magellan knew.

New York is a good spot to stop away from. Let not New York take this statement of mine to heart and go into sackcloth or cast itself into the East River, or anything rash like that; I mean it in no disparagement. What I mean to say is that one should not visit New York too often. In the first place, there is its well-



known hospitality. This in America is no empty word, it is full to the brim—and usually with rather better whisky than one can obtain in Dundee. New York meets you with glad noises on the landing stage, shakes your hand off, greases your path through the Customs, heaves you into a car and wafts you away to his habitation and presents you with the freedom of it. The Spaniard takes you to his house and presents you with the freedom of it, his servant, his ox, his ass and his Hispañzo-Suiza, bowing himself to the carpet (if any). The only difference between the Spaniard and the American is that if you took the former at his word he would shoot you; the latter if you didn't. Hospitality in America is genuine and warm-hearted and carried on with that relentless efficiency with which they handle hogs in Chicago. From the time you land in their midst to the time you leave for the sanatorium your every moment is planned and catered for. When one stalwart drops dead in the effort to keep you moving and entertained another hero leaps forward to take his place. On you go, propelled by relentless machinery like the hog down the Chicago chute, with this difference, that sheer explosive kindliness is the propelling power. There is nothing on earth to compare with their hospitality that I know of, but if indulged in too long it would sap the constitution of a polar bear.

A second reason for not visiting New York too often is that they work the transformation scene every few years and if one would admire the full glory of the scene one should not watch it in the building; it should burst on you transformed. When first I saw New York the Flatiron Building was one of the marvels of the world. When I returned this time the poor little runt could barely get its head into fresh air and was regarded by New Yorkers as a relic, merely interesting



on account of its antiquity. I paid it a sentimental visit, just to shake its hand, as it were, for the sake of old times, and to tell it that height isn't everything; we can't all be tall.

New York is not a real city, it's a fantasy in ferro-concrete. When I first approached the place it was on a frosty midwinter evening. We had sloppy weather throughout the voyage and the old *St. Louis* nosed past Robbins Reef and Bedloe's Isle, her decks slippery with ice. Black velvet night had blotted out the buildings and left nothing but lights. The myriad windows of the downtown skyscrapers were lit up and had the appearance of strings of fiery tinsel suspended from heaven. Great electric skysigns glowed over Broadway, white, ruby, emerald, leaping, fading and leaping again. Illuminated ferry boats slid across the invisible Hudson, looking like ambulant glass houses ablaze within. The railway depots on the Jersey side were crowned with huge letters of fire. The sight took my breath away. This was not the hustling, bustling, clanging, ultramodern metropolis I had expected, but a dream-city blazing like some barbaric queen in living jewels, an immense fantasy in fairy lights.

When I approached New York for the second time it fell as flat as a sand-dab. The reason was the time of day. It takes natures more soulful than mine to become really enthusiastic at seven in the morning, especially if, thanks to a somewhat protracted farewell party, one has only reached one's bed at six. We crawled through the grey of morning towards the White Star dock, the little tugs nosing round us like suckling pigs at a sow. There were no festoons and necklaces and coronets of coloured lights winking and glittering in the black velvet night. No fantasy, no magic. I told my disgruntled self that New York was

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

real, after all. Those looming grey cliffs were just skyscrapers; everything here was just like everything elsewhere, only a bit taller. There was nothing in it. Washout!

A steward appeared at my elbow saying an immigration official wanted a word with me. With visions of a week or so at Ellis Island, in the "Undesirables" cage, stripped to my underclothing, I turned away. But the fellow only wanted to know if my great-grandmother had been hung for piracy on the high-seas, or something of the sort, and though I couldn't swear to it (the old lady was capable of anything), he let me go with a caution—and New York laid her old spell on me.

It was on the same evening that it happened. I was lapping tea like a little gentleman with friends in Gramercy Park. The lights had not been switched on and a pleasant dusk filled the room. Something or other led me to the high window. A rising blue haze wrapped the piled crags of masonry in cunning veils of illusion. A frosty sunset flared over the New Jersey hills, gold, orange, crimson, deepening into green, and into the gold and the orange the skyscrapers thrust their airy heads, highest of all the slim Woolworth Building, the horned moon on one cheek, Venus on the other.

When I was a boy we had an old copy of *Don Quixote* at home, illustrated by Gustave Doré. Castles in Spain was a subject on which he could give his boundless imagination full play. They stuck in my memory, those castles of his, airy towers and turrets soaring from perilous crags to the sickle moon. With a thrill I realized that here before me were the dream towers of my boyhood, glowing and star-crowned, Castles in Spain! There and then I swore I would not visit New



THE MAGIC CARPET



York again for another decade, when they will have worked the transformation scene again.

The city grows and grows. Restricted by its narrow peninsula, it cannot grow sideways or lengthways; it must therefore grow up or down. It cannot do too much underground for fear of sapping its own foundations; it must therefore grow up and up. Another decade and the Woolworth Building, having suffered a like eclipse, will be exchanging sentiments of philosophic resignation with the poor little old Flatiron.

Traffic in New York goes slower than hearses in other places, the streets are hopelessly inadequate to the burden. The hustling citizen will not tolerate this for long and as expansion is again impossible he must again go up. In a decade or so Manhattan will be a nest of colossal pinnacles with glass flying-bridges flung across from tower to tower, one, two, three hundred feet in the air. Then I shall come back again and get a new thrill.*

Let us pass on to Philadelphia—"trains every hour, on the hour." A man I know went all the way to Malacca to buy one of the world-famous Malacca canes. When he got there he found that almost the only place in the world where they had never heard of them was Malacca. Valenciennes lace is made anywhere else but in Valenciennes, of course; and all real Spanish shawls come from Canton. I had always heard Philadelphia spoken of as "The Quaker City"; naturally, it was the last place in which I expected to find one. I had hardly entered the place, barely passed through the platform barrier, when I all but trod a Quakeress underfoot, a Quakeress in full regimentals, dove-grey, cloak, bonnet and all. Luck! A friend

* Nonsense, of course. I would come back tomorrow if any one were to ask me nicely.—*Author.*



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



who came to meet me said he had never seen one before, though he had lived several years in the city. Luck! I repeat. Let us award full marks to Philadelphia for its Quakeress, and also for more hospitality, and pass on to Chicago.

I travelled from Philadelphia to Altoona with my nose flattened against the window. The railway followed the Schuylkill and later the Susquehanna (lovely, musical Indian name) bend for bend and reach for reach through hills and woods in royal decay; forests hung with bronze and russet, silvery coppices powdered with pale gold-dust, and, here and there, the scarlet livery of the sumach. Now and again the trees opened out their ranks and one caught the glitter of water running swift and shallow between wooded cliffs, and steam rafts flapping their stern wheels in a whirl of spray. Black and white Friesian cattle stood knee-deep in the yellowing grass beside big chapel-like barns adorned with exhortations to "CHEW MAILPOUCH TOBACCO AND TREAT YOURSELF TO THE BEST."

Beautiful country! I bought two magazines and a review and read not a word of them.

At Altoona or thereabouts, dusk came down, so I ungummed my nose from the pane and sought the dining-car. A young man entered; he was collarless and dishevelled and slouched up the gangway with a twist to his mouth, half defiant, half miserable. I saw then that he was chained like a dog to the fellow behind. Another young man entered. He had a slight cut over one eye and a fresh bruise on his cheek, but there was nothing miserable about him. He wore a large diamond pin in his tie and several large rings on his fingers; had his profession permitted it he would, doubtless, have worn another in his snout, as is fashionable with most pigs and some African tribes.



THE MAGIC CARPET



He slumped down at a table opposite me and boomed for food, food! My coon waiter, shaking the soup all round the plate in his emotion, bent over me and confided that that was Al Dash, that was. From his awed tones I gathered that I was in the presence of the great, probably a movie star or a baseball pitcher. In which I erred; the gentleman was a pugilist and was then returning to his home town after a triumphant encounter with a fellow-practitioner in New York. My coon was of the opinion that in a couple of years' time the gentleman would be middleweight champion of the world.

It is my opinion that he'll be heavyweight champion in considerably less time than that. Never did I see any one eat like the rising Mr. Al Dash. He ate with a voracity and concentration positively fascinating to behold. He ate double helpings of his own food, called for double helpings for his manager, ate that and boomed for more. Admirers gathered in a respectful circle round his table and, somewhat unnecessarily, inquired after his well-being. He might have been some fragile flower, from the solicitude they showed for his health. "Well, well, Al, feeling good?" they chanted brightly. "Well, well, how's the boy?" The manager answered how the boy was; the boy himself did not deign to look up, much less reply: his mouth was too full for words. I have quite a good appetite myself and enjoy watching people enjoy themselves. I kept pigs in Africa solely for the pleasure of watching them eat. In the wet season I fed them on melons and watched them in a mackintosh. But my four large Berkshires, head-down in a mess of watermelons, were nothing to the rising Mr. Al Dash!—excepting that he didn't splash quite so much. More power to your



fork arm, Mr. Al Dash! The heavy-weight, the super-weight, championship to you!

The train showing no further promise, either of edification or amusement, I put myself to bed and woke up later to a shattering blast. "That chap's blown up," I said to myself. "Al's burst!" I then realised that the blast was the engine's and raised the blind some inches to see what all the fuss was about. We were evidently pulling out of some depot, but there was nothing to be seen, nothing but blank darkness. Then, suddenly, on the blank darkness a golden bird appeared, sitting on a golden twig. Another bird, equally golden, appeared and, flapping its bright wings, fluttered down to the first and nestled beside it. I forget what commodity this glowing device advertised, probably somebody's parrot seed—but it was very pretty.

The next morning I learned that the depot was Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, so they tell me, is a depressing town, full of smelters and rolling-mills, smoke, fog and millionaires, but I shall always remember it by its funny little electric birds flirting so prettily in the dark.

By morning Mr. Al Dash had betaken himself off and therefore was not present at breakfast, much to my disappointment, but the young crook came slouching in again, still chained, wrist to wrist, to his detective. I presume they slept like that and washed and shaved each other. I had barely time for a second cup of coffee before we were in Chicago, known in the family circle as "Chi." "Chi" was not at its winsome best. A searching wind, fresh from the ice-box, blew continuously off Lake Michigan. A chill rain fell, giving place to chillier sleet, and every single person to whom I had introductions had left town for the uttermost parts of the State—doubtless on getting wind of the impending visitation.



THE MAGIC CARPET



Crossing Michigan Avenue afoot amid the torrent of snorting motor vehicles, I experienced something of the sensations of a Spanish matador when all the bulls have got loose at once. Dropping in an "express" elevator from the top of a skyscraper, I can feel for a man who has had his stomach taken out and nailed to the ceiling. I saw five mediocre picture shows and one most excellent show of pictures. But "Chi" was frankly a disappointment. It made no effort to live up to its disreputation. I was in Chicago nearly thirty-six hours and not one murder or even one felonious assault did I see committed. Nobody was reduced to jelly in the traffic, that I know of, and, furthermore, I asked the way of several policemen and, so far from being clubbed senseless on the spot, was most courteously answered. But it would be unfair to condemn a great and earnest city on my short experience. I probably struck a bad day.

My last impression of "Chi" was another electric advertisement. "MARTY. UNDERTAKER" glowed at me invitingly. "HOMELIKE FUNERAL PARLOURS." Homelike funeral parlours!—an ormolu clock on the mantelpiece like the one Pa won for step-dancing at the Elks' convention, the old stuffed spaniel, the portraits of "Ma" Ferguson and Abraham Lincoln, anti-macassars like Mother used to make. One can imagine the deceased sitting up in his box, taking a sniff round Mr. Marty's establishment and settling back with a contented sigh, under the impression that he wasn't dead, after all. It is a beautiful idea!

I left Chicago after dinner in the upper berth of a Pullman car. I do not like the sleeping arrangements in Pullman cars, they are too much like public dormitories. One small infant with a grievance can keep about two score law-abiding citizens awake and blas-

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

phemous all night. I once fared from Toronto to Winnipeg in a Pullman car and a child of one treated us to a lifelike imitation of hell-with-the-cork-out for the best part of two nights and a day. Leaving Chicago, we were mercifully childless, but, lest the night prove uneventful, we had been provided with a gentleman who could orate in his sleep. When not under the delusion that he was being pushed off a cliff, he played cornet solos through his nose. I have known cavalry trumpeters who could make less noise with more effort. Another thing—if Americans feel they are permanently committed to the Pullman system, will they oblige me by inventing some device for pulling one's trousers off and on in the upper berth? To the accompaniment of the gentleman's snores and the dismal tolling of the "prairie bell," as we jolted through some night-wrapped village, we rolled across Wisconsin and into Iowa.

Iowa and Nebraska were with us all day, particularly Nebraska. I met a Nebraskan in Hongkong and he asked me what I thought of his native State. I told him I thought it was a case of having too much of a good thing. Whereat he recited strings of figures showing that Nebraska produces enough milk per minute to float a battleship and enough butter fat per day to grease two sides of Mont Blanc and leave a little over for breakfast. Noble work! Nevertheless I maintain that there is too much Nebraska and too much corn in it. My impression of Nebraska is twin steel rails running dead straight forever and ever across a dead level plain of dead maize. It was an ocean of yellow maize; maize north, south, east and west. Maize, maize! I should like Nebraska better if some one would plant a patch of pumpkins, vegetable



THE MAGIC CARPET



marrows, Jerusalem artichokes—any other darn thing—here and there beside the track, just to break up the maize a bit.

The train was racing along at, I suppose, forty to fifty miles per hour, but we might have been standing still, for all the difference to the scenery it made. Whichever way one looked there was exactly the same view that one had seen an hour before, and an hour before that; the same painted farm-house standing in the same poplar grove, the same old maize from horizon to horizon. Maize, maize! Villages with city names, grain-elevators for monuments, and fowls roosting on derelict Fords in the back lots, drifted up from time to time, strung like sparse beads on the twin steel wires of the Northern Pacific. The train halted, passengers disembarked and stretched their legs with all the stiffness of ancient mariners waddling ashore after long voyages. At every stop a man got out and raced up and down beside the train, exercising two French bulldogs. His wife sat grimly on the car steps and saw that he did it. Did the train stop during a meal, the poor soul had to drop his cutlet and get out and run. I used to wake up at night, the train halted, and imagine him panting up and down in his nightshirt, the dogs in their humorous way licking his bare legs. I thought O. Henry abolished that sort of slavery when he wrote "The Dogman"—but apparently not. If dogs were the decent creatures they are supposed to be, they'd form a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Men.

However, despite the monotony of the scenery, I enjoyed my day. The omnipresent maize was bathed in soft October sunshine, and a fleckless blue sky beamed over all. At Omaha I bought a voluminous



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



Sunday paper and sat sunning drowsily on the observation platform, mesmerised by the gleaming steel wires endlessly reeling out under our tail, as though the train were spinning them, spider-like, out of its bowels. The newspaper blew away, page by page, unread.

At lunch I sat opposite a tall Jew from San Francisco, a handsome and agreeable person. Conversation had not opened five minutes before he asked me what I, as a poor benighted foreigner, thought of Prohibition. I replied that I thought it an excellent measure. When Adam first met Eve he said, "How do you do? Nice weather we're having—eh?" In Europe, Asia, Africa and Tristan da Cunha we were still discussing the weather, but in the United States they say, "Pleased to meet you. What do you think of Prohibition?" Briefly, after several centuries of weather, Prohibition had furnished them with an entirely new staple subject of conversation. It was most refreshing—and would he, please, pass the salt.

Secondly, in Europe if one wanted a bottle of beer to celebrate a death or a birthday one walked into a beer-shop, said, "Beer, please," and walked out again with the bottle under one's arm, quite simply and openly. There was no more fun in it than buying a cake of soap. But in the United States, beer being necessary, you had to put on blue spectacles, a false nose and synthetic whiskers, slink on all fours down a blind alley after dark, knock seven and a half times on a secret panel, breathe the shibboleth through the key-hole, and pay five times the proper price for what might be furniture polish and again might not. Prohibition had invested the purchase of a pint bottle with all the mystery and excitement of a dime detective novel. It had brought romance within every one's



reach. A most beneficent measure—and would he pass the mustard, please?

He thrust me the salt, pepper, mustard and three kinds of sauce and accused me of being frivolous. He was strongly in favour of Prohibition, he said, but on moral and economic grounds. Alcohol sapped a man spiritually and physically; it was as much of a drug as opium or cocaine, the more insidious because its effects were not so immediately apparent. People ranted against the prohibition of alcohol as infringing personal liberty, yet upheld the prohibition of cocaine. The thing was inconsistent and absurd. What was sauce for the dope-fiend was sauce for the drink-maniac. We benighted foreigners might jeer at—

“Hold on a moment,” said I; “I’m not jeering. I told you that—”

He waved a toothpick. “Yes, I know you did, but if we’re going to agree in everything the conversation will fall flat. Do you mind being the opposition for a bit, just for the sake of my argument?”

“Not in the least,” said I. “To blazes with Prohibition! Will that do?”

“Fine, thank you! I can now continue where I left off. You poor benighted foreigners can jeer at the Volstead Act, but it’ll succeed in the end, being morally and economically sound. To obtain liquor is against the law and that alone puts it out of court with decent citizens. To obtain it also entails certain difficulties and that discourages the lazy or indifferent—a very large class. Swollen prices stop the working man, whose efficiency has increased thirty per cent. since the law came into force—and will go on increasing. Sooner or later competing nations will have to step into line—or fade out.” Again he threatened me with



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



the toothpick. "Listen while I prophesy. In twenty years it'll be a dry world and the United States will have effected the greatest moral and economic reform since the abolition of slavery."

"Give us thirty years," I pleaded.

"Why?"

"Because I am making every arrangement to be dead by then."

Thus, disagreeing by agreement, the afternoon passed pleasantly enough, and the maize slipped by unheeded.

Even Nebraska can come to an end, it appears, for the next morning we were switchbacking through the ashen hills and grey sagebrush of Wyoming. By lunch-time we had crossed the Green River at the old trading-post of the American Fur Company (scene of many wild days and nights) and were wriggling into Utah through a chink in the Wasatch Mountains.

Along the bottom of the cañon rushed a milky green river, looping and twisting, and the track looped and twisted, too, from bank to bank, so that train and stream made running figures of eight like cavalry horses in a musical ride. The river-banks were covered with feathery willows, yellow with frost, shaking and shining in the sun, and overhead towered red rocks holed and eaten like huge chunks of Gruyère cheese. Pinnacles of rock like red cockscombs lifted their jagged ridges to the blue sky. The slopes and hill-flanks showed red through the scant vegetation, as though scratched and irritated by giant claws.

We passed a gang of Mexican track-workers who treated us to a display of enormous straw hats and grinning white teeth, and later on a "bunch" of Hereford steers drowsing up a little gully while the two



THE MAGIC CARPET



punchers in charge munched their noon meal. One of them squatted on a rock close by the track, a dappled grey broncho standing at his side. He wore leather chaps laced down the side—as I did in my time—a Stetson hat banded with a rattler-skin tilted over his freckled nose, and a black shirt (to save washing)—as I did also in the days when I also herded quadrupeds at “thirty per.” Furthermore, I once owned a grey broncho just like his—if less hairy-heeled.

I loosed a glad whoop of greeting and waved my hand to him. Unfortunately, I had been blowing my nose the second before, and when I waved my hand a large white pocket-handkerchief was still in it. The whoop and the handkerchief full in the face were too much for the dapple. He spun on his hocks and went up the valley all out. My last view of the pair, as the train swept round a bend, was the grey going strong for Nebraska and its maize, and the puncher stumbling up the trail after it, food in hand, doubtless roundly cursing both it and me. If ever he reads this (which he won’t) will he please accept my apologies? I meant well.

From Ogden I deviated to Salt Lake City with the object of catching a glimpse of Brigham Young. When I got there I found he had died before I was born. Nevertheless I was glad I side-stepped, for the journey down the valley of the Great Salt Lake with the domed capitol standing up bold against a background of purple mountains and snow-peaks, with the lake itself glittering away to the westward like a sheet of white fire, was worth a deviation, not of a few miles, but of hundreds.

So Brigham Young must have thought when in July, 1847, worn-out and ill, propped up on a mattress in



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



his buggy, he came down Immigration Cañon and saw the majestic amphitheatre open before him—the Promised Land. One can think what one likes about “revelations,” the Book of Mormon, seagulls, “sealings,” polygamy and all that, but there can be no two opinions about Young’s generalship. To lead his straggling columns of decrepit wagons and pathetic hand-carts from Illinois to Utah, across the empty prairies (including the Mississippi, Missouri, North Platte and Green rivers—he crossed the first on the ice), through the snows, the heat, the Indians and finally the Rockies, is a deed that makes Moses’ trek from Egypt to Palestine look like a mere stroll. As a pioneer leader that ex-house-painter ranks second to none and it is as such that I take off my hat to him.

I took off my hat to him one evening where he stands in bronze at the top of the Pioneer Column. Sunset was flaring over the peaks of the Sierra Nevada, the Great Salt Lake was no longer white fire but molten gold. Brigham Young stood silhouetted against the burning afterglow, looking down Broadway to where the sky signs and cinema titles were already beginning to sparkle. I wondered what he thought of it, the cinemas, the big, humming city and all? He who had led the first lame ox-wagons in and laid out the first mud-chinked log-cabins?

Mormonism still thrives, but gone is the fanatic heroism of the “Hand-cart Brigade,” the sunbonnet simplicity of the sturdy old pioneer dames. In no other place have I noticed so many “Beauty Parlors” as in Salt Lake City, and the modern male “Latter Day Saint” trots about in the smartest of business suits, barbered and manicured to the last hair and nail.

One of these (in a well-pressed fawn suit and gold



THE MAGIC CARPET



pince-nez) very obligingly showed me round the remarkable Tabernacle, which looks like an immense black mushroom—Brigham Young is said to have got the idea from his umbrella. That done, he quietly and gently sought to sow the seeds of conversion. He did it so gradually that at first I did not recognise what was happening, but when I did I plumped straight down on a bench close to the metal effigies of the holy Smith brothers and let him convert ahead, all ears. It is so long since any one has detected any signs of spiritual possibilities in me that I felt extremely grateful—there might be hope yet; also I wanted to hear something of the gospel which had inspired those devoted simpletons into enduring much persecution and hardship. I heard it, not all, but quite a lot. My missionary was courteous, plausible and in earnest; his pale eyes shone through his gold pince-nez.

“And this polygamy?” I asked.

He made a sweep of his hand. “Has not been practised since 1890.”

“Then you’ve washed out the only attractive item of your creed,” said I. “If ever you should decide to reinstate it, cable me. Till then adieu and thank you.”

That night at dinner in the Utah Hotel, between dessert and coffee, my coon waiter asked me if I knew anything of Thibet. I asked him why he was interested in Thibet and he replied that he had read a lot about it in a magazine and it had taken his fancy. He would like to see Lhasa. How did one get there? And how much would it cost? I told him, to the best of my small knowledge, and added fifty cents to his tip. I have a vision of that black and humble person, some years hence, plodding through the rhododendrons of the Chumbi Valley on his way to the Hidden City and would like to think my fifty cents helped him a mile or



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



two on his way. It is of such stuff that Marco Polos are made.

From Ogden Pacificwards one travels by a single-track trestle bridge, thirty miles long, thrown straight across the lake from side to side. The railway folders describe the journey as "Going to sea in a train," and the description is not inapt. Imagine floating off in a railway truck from Dover to Calais, or Woods Hole to Nantucket Island, and you have something of the sensation produced by the Great Salt Lake Cut-off. Great as the Salt Lake is to-day, geologists have determined that formerly it was vastly greater, filling the whole huge basin between the Sierra Nevada and Wasatch ranges. Eons of evaporation have reduced it to a mere fraction of its original size. As the water fell, the eastern shore, being the steepest, emerged first, accumulated soil and has been cultivated by Brigham & Co. The western shore, drying out later, is still a salty desert. I have crossed the Rehamna with its black nomad tents, seen the swimming mirages of the Gebel Uwêbid and the twisted sand-waves of the Great Kalahari, but nothing more impressive than the western side of the Salt Lake Valley. It is like the end of the world; the world after it has emerged from too close a contact with the sun, or has been consumed by its own stupendous internal fires, burnt out, devastated, a mere ash-heap. For hours the train races on and on across a dead, silent wilderness of sand and salt-swamp walled in by ranks of mountains like burnt-out slag-heaps, mountains of red ash and coke. There is no sign of life at all, not a bush, not a blade, not a beast, not a bird, not even fish: the waters are too bitter. By evening we were well in among the mountains, and under the fiery touch of sunset the slag-heaps began to



burn again, red and smouldering, like the mountains of some Dantesque inferno.

The next morning when I went to shave I found an elderly Hindoo, draped from head to foot in yellow butter muslin, preening himself before the mirror. I learned later that he and his valet (a Cockney) had come aboard at Reno—famed for divorces and prize fights—and that the valet had given out that his master was no less than an Indian rajah. I have met two rajahs of high degree. One of them was kind enough to steal a car-load of mixed dogs for me when I was trying to run a pack of harriers, between battles, in France. The dogs, I fear, were mainly ravished from ladies of the *demi-monde* in Amiens. One of them was a pug and every time it saw a hare it ran up a tree—but that is another story. The point is that, so far from dressing up like pats of butter, the most finished tailors in Savile Row were none too good for this exalted pair. My Hindoo and his Cockney got off at Sacramento amid a great flutter of welcoming ladies. He may have been a prince, but I am willing to bet he was also open to do a bit of yogi-ing as a side line—at five dollars the yog.

During breakfast the train was halted and all hands disembarked to admire a depression known as Cañon View. I turned out with the rest, viewed the view and returned to my breakfast. It was quite a nice little cañon and was, doubtless, doing its best, but after the tragic splendour of the Utah gorges left me cold. Moreover, I must confess that at eight in the morning there is no scenery in the world I admire so much as a plateful of ham and eggs.

All the morning we were trundling down the foothills, among pleasant orchard lands. Then the hills gave way to flats and presently we were rumbling



aboard the huge ferry that was to bear us, train and all, across the Carquinez Straits.

The railway from Port Costa to Oakland follows the shores of San Pablo and San Francisco bays. The former is twelve miles across; its waters stretch out like a sea; from the train there is no sign of the opposite coast, or none that I remember. A calm, pale turquoise sea, fringed with duck blinds and spider-legged shanties for the accommodation of local ducking clubs. Judging by the number of associations dedicated to their destruction, Oakland must be constantly threatened by an Egyptian plague of ducks. Or, perchance, male Oakland finds his islet retreat a convenient refuge in time of domestic strain. He just paddles out to his stilted shanty, hauls up the ladder behind him—and there you are! Who shall come at him? “Ducking,” when you come to think of it, has more meanings than one.

The train puffed along the Oakland Mole, emptied us into a second ferry and away we steamed on the last link of the transcontinental chain. San Francisco lay before us across the narrow waters of the Strait. A fervent “native son” stood beside me, indicating points of interest with a sweeping forefinger. That steamer with the red-banded funnel with a price on the band, like a cigar, was the one that would take me on. That steamer backing in was from Los Angeles; that hauling out for Seattle. This close at hand was Goat Island. That further out was Alcatraz, a kind of hotel. The Golden Gates? Oh, they were out of sight, round the corner. Up there were Twin Peaks—I must motor up there and get the view, wonderful! Nothing like it! And the Presidio, I must see that, wonderful, too! And Golden Gate Park and Ocean Beach, wonderful! All of it wonderful!



THE MAGIC CARPET



"Gee!" he breathed. "This little old spot sure looks good to me! A sight for sore eyes. Gee!"

"Been away long?" I asked.

"Ten days, nearly—back in Nevada. Gee! I'd sooner be dead than East!"



San Francisco takes a stroll through his home town.

CHAPTER II

OAHU

Liners leave England for the world's ends with little fuss. The "All ashore!" bugle blows; somebody on the dock bawls gruffly, "My regards to Alf!" and is answered from the steerage deck with a gruff "Right O!" The old-timers are below laying down the law to their cabin stewards. The first-timers are striding the deck, manfully trying to look like old-timers, wondering in their sick hearts if Kitty will wait three years and if there'll be a letter from her at Gib. The band strikes up "Auld Lang Syne," a few handkerchiefs flutter, and the ship is off.

The French do not travel for pleasure. *Il n'y a qu'un pays de France*, and they regard any time spent away from her shores as bitter exile. The big black-funnelled steamers of the Messageries Maritimes steaming out past Château d'If for the Far East are sad ships. Men tweak their moustaches, women blow their noses, damp eyes peer longingly for a last glimpse of Notre Dame de la Garde.

If the French are covert in their woe, there is no such dissembling among the Germans. They lament openly and without restraint. To sharpen the pangs of farewell the band serves up all the sentimental morsels on its menu, and what can be more sentimental than a German folk-song? I left Cuxhaven some years ago on a Hamburg-American packet and when we let go our warps I don't believe there was a dry eye on board. Everybody sobbed or snuffled — even the



sturdy seamen who with any luck should be back among the sausages and sauerkraut within a month. I believe I was a trifle moist myself, I who had been in the Fatherland far too long, either for its comfort or mine, and was heartily glad to be quitting. I cannot vouch for the captain, but I am open to bet he was hanging limp over his telephone, spattering the bridge with large, lukewarm tears.

The Spaniard leaves his native land in a very different spirit. I was once aboard a west-bound liner that put into Corunna. Immediately we dropped anchor we were surrounded by a swarm of shore-boats weighed deep with chattering Gallegos, male and female. Some carried small horse-hide trunks, but most were burdened only with a red handkerchief bundle and an umbrella. Trunks or bundles were optional, it seemed, but an umbrella was absolutely *de rigueur*; everybody had one. They clambered aboard, joking, laughing, pushing, like excursionists off for a day's holiday.

"Where are these folks going to?" I asked the third officer. "Vigo?"

"Oh, Lord, no!" said he. "They're *Americanos* for Cuba."

To embark cheerfully for the New World with no more assets than an umbrella and a change of socks struck me as courageous in the extreme—till I learned that they only stayed long enough to cut the sugar crop and would be home again in three months.

But of all passengers going down to the sea, Americans are the most light-hearted—possibly because in most cases they are only going for pleasure, whereas, in the first instances, the parting is of necessity and for precarious years. Also, they are the world's champion see-ers off. When I went aboard the steamer that was



to carry me to Honolulu my first thought was, "Where are we all going to sleep?" My second, that I had strayed into a gigantic wedding-reception. The ship was not huge, as ships go, but half the population of California seemed to be congregated on her decks and all of 'em *en fête*. People embraced, pranced about bombarding each other with paper streamers, and embraced again. Chinese boys slipped around with tea, cake and soft drinks. The band offered up jazz music for its dear life. Couples danced the Charleston. Parties of youths raised college yells, and every woman on board had, approximately, three large expensive bouquets folded in her arms. A most floral and festive occasion.

"I shall enjoy this trip," said I to myself—"provided I don't have to sleep in the cold storage with the celery."

Then the whistle blew, ninety per cent of the crowd suddenly transferred itself to the dock and there was room enough on the decks, if not to swing a cat, at least a small sardine. The ship backed out, women hurled flowers from their bouquets; the paper streamers snapped, a dozen at a time; the college boys howled like hyenas; handkerchiefs fanned the air; the jazz bandsmen hammered and hooted like things possessed; everybody cheered.

"All very jolly," said I to myself, noting with satisfaction that the crowd on removing itself had left its most prepossessing members still with us. "As I told you before, you're going to enjoy yourself." Nor was the promise belied. We steamed slowly to the northward, past the wharves and ferry-landings, past Alcatraz, that "sort of hotel," then west past the green slopes of Fort Mason and the Presidio, three aëroplanes flying overhead like attendant gulls, a revenue



launch caracoling like a dolphin in our wake, on the outlook for dumped liquor, so I was told. Night fog spread itself over the city of San Francisco, wreathed itself round the crest of the Tamalpais. Mile Rocks lighthouse winked its eye across the Golden Gate to its mate on Bonita Point as we passed through. Sutro Baths and Cliff House showed a blaze of lights over the Seal Rocks. We swung up the North Channel rolling like a pig in a trough. The chatter became abruptly stilled, the crowded decks deserted.

A pilot schooner with the overhang of a racing yacht thrashed alongside. The pilot, a most un-nautical figure in a plush hat and striped overcoat, went overside, hanging on the Jacob's ladder, waiting for his dinghy to rise and catch him. Light from the open port glinted on a rushing wave-crest. The dinghy came up on the wave and the pilot stepped into it as one would step off a street-car. The helmsman of the hovering shadow that was the schooner hailed our bridge. Badinage was exchanged, salted with those epithets that Dr. Johnson has described as "terms of affection among seamen" and ending with a warning against wooden money. Then the schooner filled away and the night engulfed her. The long westerly swell, rolling unhampered across four thousand miles of ocean, took us into its leisurely swing.

Down below a bell clanged, slowly our engines began to pound. The fo'c'sle swung southwest as though seeking some guiding star, swung back two points and steadied. We lurched forward over an onswEEPing hillock of dark water. Good-bye, U. S. A. ! Forward, Honolulu ! two thousand miles away.

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"We continued to see birds all day . . . and between the latitude of 10° and 11° we saw several tur-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



tles. All these are looked upon as signs of the vicinity of land. However, we discovered none till daybreak in the morning of the 18th, when an island made its appearance, bearing northeast by east. . . .”

Such was the discovery of the Hawaiian Islands by Captain James Cook on January 18th, 1778. They were named the Sandwich Islands after Lord Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, and not after the edible, as might be imagined in view of what the natives subsequently did to the discoverer. Cook landed and was worshipped as a god. A description of his party was sent to the other islands. “The men are white; their skin is loose and folding; their heads are angular; fire and smoke issue from their mouths; they have openings in their bodies into which they thrust their hands and draw out iron, beads, nails and other treasures, and their speech is unintelligible. This is the way they speak: ‘A hikapalale, hikapalale, hioluai, oalaki, walawalki, waiki, poha.’” I must admit that their speech is as unintelligible to me as it was to the ancient Hawaiians.

The ships sailed north but returned a year later and anchored in Kealakahua Bay on the island of Hawaii. Trouble arising between his men and the natives, Cook, in his intrepid way, went ashore, imagining that he could settle it by personality alone and without force of arms. He paid for his temerity with his life, receiving a spear in the back. His body was cut to bits and the bits were distributed among the chiefs—and I trust he gave them acute indigestion. Eventually, at the deep-voiced request of the ship’s guns, the bones were returned, wrapped in a cloth of black and white feathers. Thus ended the one-time collier-boy who was with Wolfe at Quebec and who put more land on



OAHU



the map than any other single explorer in the history of discovery.

For myself, I discovered Oahu at dawn on the morning of our sixth day out. As I have intimated, I am not one of those blithe souls who leaps out of bed at the first blink of day, ringing the welkin (whatever



Captain James Cook rediscovers Waikiki.

that is) with gay songs and laughter. I abhor the hour—and, mind you, nobody knows more about it than I do. For years of my life I was up and about long before the first worm had turned on its couch or the earliest bird cocked an eye. I have seen dawn pulling off its little stunt all round the world, coming up over the prairies, the deserts, the seas, the Atlas Mountains, the Alps, the Rockies and the Albert Memorial,



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



and anybody is welcome to it as far as I am concerned. Dawn, in my experience, usually finds me unshorn, unwashed, breakfastless and shivering. It is also the hour when one's friends get hanged by the neck and one's superiors (lying comfortably asleep at Headquarters) select for you to go over the bags and get a bullet in the stomach. How on earth the poet manages to raise any head of steam standing under a wet hedge, soaked to the fetlocks in dew, two hours before breakfast, is a matter which has always set me, an expert in dawns, wondering and wondering. It is my belief he doesn't—he couldn't. It is my belief that all the best dawn stuff was written in bed.

I arose at dawn off Oahu because a godless Chinese came and did some fortissimo work on a gong outside my door. I told him to go away and where I'd like him to go, but he took no notice and went on whanging. Raising myself on my elbow, I said, "Look here, my son, stop that noise and get out of here, chop, chop! Otherwise master gets up and kicks John from here to Tuesday week. Master too much peeved, my word! Do you savvy me or dontcher?"

Apparently he didn't, for the din increased. After that, as a man of honour, it was up to me to arise and kick. Hastily donning a bathrobe, I opened the door and sprang upon him—that is to say, I would have if he'd been there. I searched all along C deck, and B deck and ascended to A deck and there, behold! was my quarry, an expression of celestial calm upon his face, a cup of hot coffee in his hand. He had the nerve to offer it to me, too! I prepared to kick and then discovered that in my haste I was wearing bare feet instead of boots. You cannot kick a Chinaman with a bare foot—unless you are bent on giving him a good, hearty laugh.



Said I to a friend, "I've promised to kick this heathen; to avoid disappointing the poor deserving creature, will you lend me one of your shoes to do it with?"

Said she to me, "No, that I will not. I don't want it split and Chinks never appreciate kindness, anyway. Drink up his coffee and come and look at the view."

As nobody appeared eager to lend me their boots I did as I was bid. I will say this for Oahu; despite my unshorn, unwashed, breakfastless state, I was glad that blighted Chinaman had roused me out. Can I say more?

Koko Head was on the starboard quarter, abeam was Mausalua Bay with the surf heaping on its coral barrier. To the eastward reared the mountains, gloomy cones smoking like volcanoes, crowned with dingy cloud-caps, veiled with shifting slants of mist and rain, blue-black, grey, dismal. Then over the searim came the sun and in a second all had changed. It was as though some one had touched a button, lighting up everything, within and without. The dingy clouds were dingy no longer, but went soaring up into the blue like great orange lanterns, ravelling themselves round the lava-peaks in scarves of primrose silk. The drifting rain-slants were shot with iridescent glimmers; the gloomy mountain-flanks bloomed with every verdant hue—olive, myrtle, emerald; and in the sea itself marvellous stains of colour came to life, milky jade in the shallows, apple-green and corn-cockle blue in the deeps.

We rounded Diamond Head, its lighthouse blinking its eye at the dawn as one facing too bright a light, saw the sparkle of foam along Waikiki beach and afar the white buildings of Honolulu. The quarantine launch came plunging towards us, spray-heads flying like lit



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



jewels, a school of flying fish skimming the wave-crests before her, and above her a whirl of white-tailed tropic birds. After that—there being a feeling among my friends that I should better impress the quarantine officer clad more extensively than in a simple bathrobe—I went below to dress. I shaved to the strains of the official band, playing the official anthem, “Aloha,” on the dockside. We had arrived.

I have several old sea-faring friends who visited Honolulu away back in the seventies or eighties, and at the mere mention of the place their mouths twitch and their eyes light up.

“Honolulu! Yes, I was there in the little *Minerva*, God knows how long ago. We came up from the Gilberts against the nor’east Trades. It was a jolly spot! Every house wide open and everybody gave hops and picnics. Sat out eleven dances running with the same girl under one of those pink shower-trees and swore to love her till Doomsday. I was a midshipman then and everything was deuced romantic—a warm starry night and the scent of oleanders all about—you know how it is. Honolulu!”

Or, “’Ornolulu! Cripes, yes! Was there in the ’ull whaler *Mary Fulton* ’ome-bound from the Bering. Snow, ice, misery an’ stinkin’ little Eskimos—then all of a sudden-like them there islands—a mass o’ flowers an’ fruit, an’ everybody laughin’. I got a skinful, slept out under a bush all night and woke up next mornin’ fair smothered, like a corpse, in them there ginger blossoms. The Kanaka gals ’avin’ their fun. An’ not a cent gone from my pockets, sir, not a cent. Everybody smilin’ an’ go as you please. Why, I’ve seen the bloomin’ king sittin’ in a saloon in ’is pyjamas, playin’ poker with the whaler captains. I ’ave, so ’elp me! ’Ornolulu!”



Naval officer of the trim white corvette, rough boat-steerer of the *Mary Fulton*, the Hawaiian Islands have remained to them a gracious and dewy memory; a memory of boyhood, long ago and far away; a memory of remote islands reached after months of weary sea-faring; islands where the breakers leapt glittering along coral beaches and the night-winds blew warm and steady, blossom-scented; where rain fell in a golden mist; where all doors were open and everybody smiled. Happy memories! Happy islands! Laughing, lovable, infinitely lazy.

Crossing from San Francisco I shared a cabin with a man who wasted more time in getting himself clothed than any one I ever met. It was his constant habit to dress himself, then, recollecting that he hadn't had a bath, he was forced to strip and dress again. He also specialised in getting into his clothes the wrong way about. As a pair of trousers, however commodiously cut, seldom feel comfortable worn back to front, this, of course, meant more undressing and redressing. In addition, he had a trick of hiding studs, sock-suspenders, etc., overnight and in the morning forgetting where he had hidden them, with the result that he usually scrambled down to breakfast just as lunch was being cleared away. With these peculiarities in mind I was not amazed to hear that he was an efficiency expert, but what did astonish me was that he practised his art in Oahu.

In my ignorance I no more associated efficiency experts with the Hawaiian Islands than cab-drivers with Venice—and I told him so. He hooted at my innocence. What did I expect to find? Lot of grass huts with pigs nosing in and out and Kanakas pulling hula-hula stuff, all dolled up in fig-leaves? All that old movie stuff? Might have been like that before ninety-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



eight, he couldn't say, but he could assure me that was all as dead as canned lobster now, so I needn't worry myself. Honolulu was as live and progressive a city as could be found in California—or anywhere else. Its population was bordering on the hundred thousand, its building permits amounted to several million dollars yearly. He padded up and down the cabin, wearing one of his own socks and one of mine, shooting off strings of statistics.

Work for efficiency experts? He'd tell the world! What did the islanders do before the annexation? Maybe cultivated enough *taro* to keep body and soul together and then went surfing for the rest of the day. What were their imports? Nil. What were their exports? Nix. What did they care? Nothing. If it hadn't been for him and his kind they might have remained in the same benighted state forever, whereas the islands now shipped over six hundred thousand tons of raw sugar annually and five million cases of pineapples. One might cross from one side of Oahu to the other and see nothing but miles and miles of sugar-cane, varied by miles and miles of pineapples—an uplifting sight. Followed more statistics relating to coffee, rice, tourists, tobacco, real estate, education, population, Odd Fellows, Red Men, Elks and Eagles. The booming of the gong interrupted the recital, so I reclaimed my sock and went to dinner, leaving him under the bunk searching for his own.

Honolulu is all he claimed for it. "Pep" is its motto, "Zip" its watchword. "Life is real estate and life is earnest." "Attaboy, and heaven help the hindermost!" It has its Rotary Club dizzily rotating, its Tourists Bureau rhapsodising, its Chamber of Commerce boasting at the top of its lungs. It has its Stock Exchange, its Medical, Bar, Engineers and Chemists associations



attending to their various businesses, Civic and Welfare clubs, attending to other peoples'. It is supplied with electricity, gas, water, refrigerators, telephones, street-cars, daily papers, cinemas, prohibition and mosquitoes. It has been laid out in straight streets and square blocks, numbered, catalogued, cleansed, purified, disinfected, filtered, fumigated, sterilised, deodorised, peptonised and bowdlerised. It is about as romantic as a hospital ward.

That something of the sort should happen was inevitable—once the annexation had taken place. No progressive nation could be expected to neglect so inviting a commercial opportunity for merely sentimental reasons. The old Honolulu of open doors and *dolce far niente* has vanished, but behind it soar the unconquerable peaks, green with fern and guava, crowned with a changing pageant of Trade clouds, whilst against the blue and emerald of their flanks the fairy rainbows flicker and gleam as brightly as they ever did. These beauties are indestructible.

The rainbows are not the only fairy things in Oahu. There is a park out beyond Waikiki, Kapiolani the name of it, where pink and blue water-lilies float and where excitable little mina birds squabble among sprays of golden-shower. In this park there is an aquarium containing things we must—for lack of a better word—call fish. Fish they may be, in a scientific sense, but they are as much like the stuff we Northerners catch on rods and subsequently devour as orchids are like cabages.

In my room at the hotel I found a Bible, deposited by an association of Christian commercial travellers, with certain advice printed on the fly-leaf. "If tired of sin, read Luke 18:9:14. If trade is poor, read Psalm 37. If you are losing your confidence in man,

read, Cor. 13." Very soothing for the depressed confidence man, no doubt, but it said nothing about what one was to do "If, while trying to write connected sentences, every old spinster in the hotel starts her ukulele lesson."

Getting no advice from the fly-leaf, I used to turn my nose westward and seek refuge among the cool green tanks of the aquarium. They have fish there that look like rocky excrescences of the rocks to which they cling; pink pin-cushions that are in reality sea-urchins; balloon fish with hare-lips and canary chiffon tails; fish with horns like unicorns, fish beaked like birds; drab-speckled fish with wings, that look like grey owls; fish of bright indigo blue; fish striped like zebras, black and yellow; squirrel fish like bars of red gold and others that are slabs of gleaming silver. There is the Trigger Fish, a round-faced chap, gun-metal brown with a pink tail. The Lauhau with a black badger stripe over his eye, his front-half electric blue, his tail-half amber; and a cousin of his, saffron, striped from stem to stern with bands of lilac. There is the Papiopo, silver with violet fins and tail. The Hinalea Loko, purple spotted with a daffodil tail. The Ulaula, belted with vivid rose and orange. There are scores of species flitting like butterflies through the translucent water, glowing and shimmering, clowns in shape, harlequins in design, striped, splashed, gilt and painted with every conceivable colour and tint, trailing fins and tails of georgette fichu behind them. The Creator must have been in sparkling and whimsical mood on the day He conceived the fishes of Hawaii.

And their names! There is one little fellow who has Humuhumunukunukeapuaa on his visiting-cards, and another, a bright yellow chap with a snout like an anteater, who signs himself Lauwiliwilinukunukuoee. It

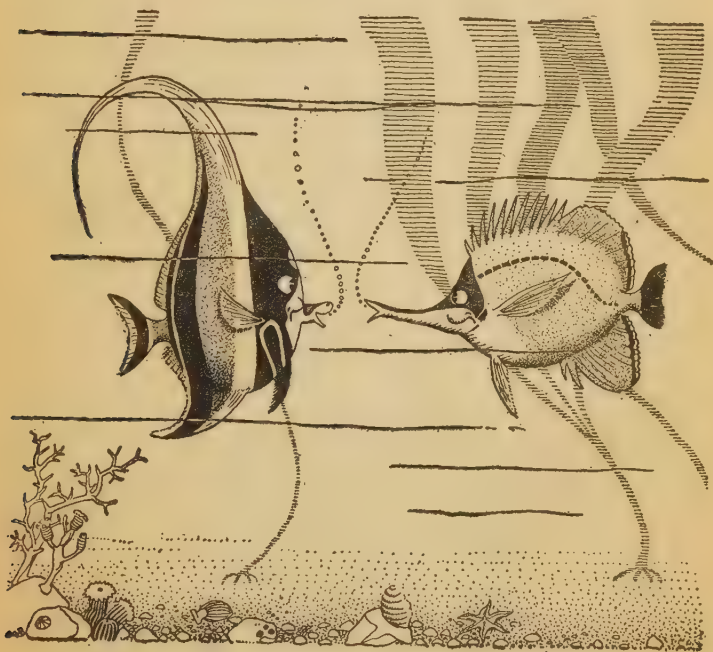


must be very awkward getting that out over the 'phone.

"Who is that calling?"

"Mr. Lauwiliwiliukunukuofoe. Is Mrs. Humu-humunukunukeapuaa at home?"

"Can't hear. Spell it, please."



When Freak meets Freak.

Both: "Forgive me if I laugh."

!!!!!!!

Very awkward! I would much prefer to be the gleaming silver slab who is known simply as "Uu."

But we must return to more serious matters. The Kanaka, how has he fared in the tidal-wave of progress that has swept his inheritance? He stands in propor-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



tion to the invaders at less than one to fourteen. The Japs outnumber him by nearly one hundred thousand, the Filipinos by fifteen thousand; he is outnumbered by the Anglo-Saxon, the Portuguese and Chinese. In the excellent Bishop Museum are many stuffed specimens of Hawaiian birds and beasts—but there is no stuffed specimen of Kanaka. I trust the authorities will secure a really good type before it is too late and the fine race becomes extinct under the swarm of busy, undersized little Orientals who spawn like cod-fish in these fertile islands. For go under he will, the original Kanaka; lazy, pleasure-loving, generous, he cannot cope with the ferocious competition of Ah Sing of Canton or Mr. Kawasaki of Osaka—nor does he try.

It is a pity, for he is a nice creature, musical, humorous, hospitable, physically perfect, a good horseman, a good sailor, like a seal in the water. To watch a quartet of Hawaiians balanced on their surfboards, racing a spray-plumed breaker shorewards at twenty-five miles an hour, their wet bodies shining like polished bronze, is to watch Tritons, very sea-gods at play. I have sat at bridge after dinner in bungalows out at Waikiki, heard a rustle in the bushes outside, a mysterious chuckle, the tinkle of a ukulele (that Portuguese importation), and then half a dozen voices breaking softly into some wistful Hawaiian song. It is a party of Kanaka boys who have been loading sugar on the hot wharves all day. The song dies away, you applaud, the bushes rustle again and the singers are gone as mysteriously as they came, asking no reward other than your approval. All very charming.

I learn from the official folder that "Laus, or Hawaiian feasts, and huki-laus, or pulling in of the great fish-nets, are often arranged for the edification and amusement of visitors," so I suppose the Chamber



of Commerce has a few tame natives on tap who can at any time be turned on to laus or huki in a thoroughly genteel and edifying manner; but I have not seen them myself. Besides these instances, a few burly stevedores, an occasional flower-woman, and a handful of dames out marketing in "Mother Hubbards" (that hideous creation of the missionary), one sees little or nothing of the Hawaiian about Honolulu.

It would be difficult to determine what one does see. Take a dozen nationalities, grading from pure white through every shade of yellow, buff, tan and mahogany up to pure black—Nordic, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Porto-Rican, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Polynesian, Hindoo, Negro—remove all prejudices and colour bars, shuffle them indiscriminately, intermarry them haphazard and what are the results? The results may be seen any morning leaving the big public school on the Waikiki road, but what they are, racially speaking, heaven alone knows and I'm sure the gentleman who compiles the census statistics for the Territory of Hawaii knows no more than I do, though, for appearances' sake he makes a brave show at it.

To see the Kanaka at home, one must turn one's back on the hotels and bungalows and business blocks of Honolulu and push back into those mountain fastnesses into which competition and the advancing pineapple have driven him.

In a garden in Manoa I met with a young cattleman who was of necessity in for the day and impatient to be out again and who, curiously enough, turned out to be a connection of my own. Pacing up and down under a tent of blue-flowering jackarandas we talked shop, beef on the heel and horses in the rough, from Alberta to Rhodesia, from Texas back to Hawaii; and concerning the last he showed a very different picture of



island life to that generally conceived. Of hill country so shielded from the Trades that hardly any rain fell and the cattle subsisted on cactus as they do in some parts of arid New Mexico; of peaks covered with perpetual snow and cañons painted like those of Utah; of isolated ranches where no *malihini* ever sets foot and the native cowboys live much as ever, wearing wreaths of flowers round their palm-leaf hats as they gallop perilously up hill and down dale after wild scrub cattle, eating enormously, dancing and singing by night to the twang of their steel guitars.

He asked me to come with him and we would go back into the ranges, far from the city lights, and see real life. He would lend me as slick a pony as ever I threw leg across, and show me a boy who had been to the Pendleton Round-up and wiped the grass with all the Western cracks. We would have a proper *luau* with pigs roasted whole and turn the girls on to *hula*. We would have the helluvatime.

We should have, I'm sure, but it couldn't be done, not then. My time was up, the East was beckoning, and I had booked my passage and was leaving in two days. Whatever of old Honolulu has passed away, its ancient hospitality has not. On departure they have a pretty custom of hanging round your neck garlands of coloured paper, ginger or maile flowers—*leis* they call them. I was given twenty-six and looked more like a harvest thanksgiving than anything else, the tips of my ears and eyebrows alone being visible. They tell you to wear all your *leis* until the ship actually leaves and then pitch one or two overboard. If your *lei* should swim ashore you will return, if it doesn't you won't.

The band played "Aloha" (which means "good-bye" as well as "welcome," "how-d'y-do," "love," and about half a dozen other things—a hard-working non-



committal word), the ship went free and I consigned my festoons to the deep. It struck me that if I did it quickly, while the ship was backing, her wash was pretty certain to carry the flowers ashore. One is supposed to leave the direction of the *leis* to inevitable Fate, but it has been my experience that Fate becomes even more inevitable if given some slight assistance. Anyhow, it worked in my case; when last seen my wreaths were hastening shorewards with the directness of homing pigeons and, in due course, I shall return to the surf and the rainbows and eat roast pig with my fingers up in the hills.

“Aloha!” Or in other words, “*Au revoir!*”

R. I. P.

When halts my earthly roundabout
And music dies and lights go out,
Bury me not in dripping mould for sickly worms to plunder,
But sink me deep by Diamond Head,
Where coral sprays shall be my bed,
And sea-flowers blossom white and red
Ten fathoms under.

There shall I lie while sunlight seeps
Down through the green and crystal deeps,
And watch the shadows of the ships that pass upon their courses,
And see the rover Tritons ride
Shorewards upon the sapphire tide
Blowing on pearly horns, bestride
Their foam-white horses.

Dawn shall one glowing opal be,
And noon with purple drench the sea;
Wrapped in imperial splendour I shall slumber out the hours.
And when the full moon climbs the night
I shall be lapped in silver light,
With eerie flames and bubbles bright.
Bursting in showers.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



And fairy fish with tails of lace
Shall make my bones a trysting-place,
The painted fish, the rainbow fish, the fish of shining wonder,
Flashing and frisking out and in
With jewelled eyes and spangled fin,
And my old skull will grin and grin,
Ten fathoms under.

CHAPTER III

THE PACIFIC

Crossing the North Atlantic the last gull waves its wing to you a few miles west of Mixen Head and you see no more until you are off Long Island shore, when a few scavengers come off mixed with little land birds who have either been blown out to sea, or flown out in the hopes of a free ride back. The South Atlantic is also comparatively birdless, except for that lone cruiser the great white albatross, six feet from tip to tip. But on the three thousand, three hundred odd miles between Honolulu and Yokohama you are never free from birds: long-pinioned man o' war birds skimming the surface like swallows; white bo'sun birds with their more pigeon-like flight and their stiff twin tail-feathers (representing the bo'sun's marlinespike); red-tailed and white-tailed tropic birds, and the sooty albatross.

The reason for the birds is that, though you may not see them, there are islands, islands all the way. One thinks of the Hawaiian Islands as a small cluster of eight, set down as a convenient half-way house, in the middle of the Pacific, whereas, taking from Ocean Island in the extreme west to Cape Kumukahi in Hawaii, they extend for no less than fifteen hundred miles, or, transposed, from New York to Galveston, or London to Athens. When, at last, the Hawaiian chain comes to an end there is the Anson Archipelago to take up the story, and after that the Magelhaes Archipelago, and so on to Asia. Had man jumping



powers in proportion to the flea he could go from Honolulu to China afoot and save a lot of money.

Of the islands you see little. I remember only one, and that at sunset on the first day out, a rocky heap standing straight out of the sea, which I took to be a cloud at first; but they are always close at hand, as the chart will show, congregating in sociable groups, strung like beads, or dotted down singly here and there, wherever the map was looking a bit bare. Banks and islets raised from the sea-bed, the incessant labour of millions of insects working for thousands of years; others, lava-peaks, spewed up in as many minutes, slowly gathering soil and seed from those master fertilisers, the winds and birds. Most of these islands are uninhabited, but on some men eke out an existence, cable operators forwarding birthday salutations from Bertie in the Wu-tchang to Gertie in Poughkeepsie; gatherers of *bêche de mer*, guano, shell and copra.

While I was at Honolulu a liner put in with a story to tell. She was from New Zealand to Vancouver calling at Suva. While at Suva the Governor of Fiji had asked the captain if he would look in on a certain island on his way north; he had an idea that there might be a white man marooned there. A company had acquired the copra rights of this place some years before and sent a man out. Since then the first company had gone into bankruptcy and sold out to a second company, which in turn had failed. In the process of double dissolution nobody seems to have remembered poor Robinson Crusoe.

How the Governor of Fiji got the idea into his head I was not told. Anyhow, it was only an idea. The bankruptcy had happened a long time before and the man might have signalled a chance schooner, landed in Australia and been comfortably settled down in



THE PACIFIC



Sydney for the last two or three years. He might be running a poultry farm in Sussex or a poolroom in Hoboken, having long since forgotten the island and all about it. He might be anywhere, doing anything; he might even be dead. Still, would the captain take a look-see, please? . . . there was just a chance.

The captain said he would, it was not far out of his course; so the liner ran eleven hundred miles to the north, past the outposts of the Tongas and Tokelaus, entered the Phœnix group and closed in on the island, blowing her siren. Presently it was reported that there was a canoe putting out. The liner eased up, the canoe came alongside and out of her rose the forgotten man, an elderly Britisher.

Solitude engenders thought; one can imagine that in all the years he had been on that island he had been thinking pretty busily, puzzling over this and that, wondering what had occurred here, there and everywhere; the world was big with momentous happenings when last he had heard of it. One can imagine him sitting on the beach looking out over the toss of the surf day after day, month after month, compiling a list of burning questions to fire at the first-comer, that he would splutter into excited speech and never stop. As a matter of fact, when that ship did come his tongue failed him completely. A friend of mine who was there said it was the most pathetic sight he ever saw, the elderly derelict standing in the outrigger staring up at the big liner swaying quietly on the swell and the rows and rows of faces above him, utterly incapable of speech.

When the eighteen survivors of the Magellan expedition, the first circumnavigators of the world, got home to Seville they found they were twenty-four hours ahead of everybody else. Nowadays it would be



astonishing to find Spain so little behind everybody else, but in those days it set the pace for other countries and Sebastian de Cano and his sturdy seventeen were considerably puzzled. They had kept careful check of the days, yet here they were, convinced that it was Monday while everybody else swore it was Sunday and was going to Mass. Very awkward indeed! Picture yourself consistently turning up for dinner par-



"To-day's to-morrow!"

ties, etc., the day before you are expected. A little of that gets a man disliked. Contemporary Seville hostesses probably said a lot of hard things about poor Sebastian.

" . . . there was I sitting in the *patio* in complete negligé (I confess I find these new straight-laced stomachers very trying in the hot weather), Mariana tubbing little Esteban, baby Isabella teasing the cat, when who should walk in but the Señor Capitano de Cano all dressed up for an occasion! I fled, leaving



THE PACIFIC



the Capitano to my husband, Don Filip. Presently comes Don Filip rapping at my door.

" 'Tell him to go!' I hissed. 'My stomacher is under the orange-bush!'

" 'But he says he's come to dinner.'

" 'Dinner! But I asked him to-morrow!'

" 'He declares to-day's to-morrow!!!!'

The reason for poor Sebastian's mistake, as every superior modern child knows, was that in chasing the sun westward a ship should retard her clocks four minutes for every degree of longitude sailed, and this de Cano had failed to do. Nowadays the 180th Meridian (being directly opposite that of Greenwich, from which all nautical time starts) is used as a date-line and on crossing it west-bound vessels drop twenty-four hours and east-bound add them on.

The vessel I was in shoved her forefoot through the 180th Meridian at midnight exactly, thus an entire day dropped out of the calendar. Provided you are childish enough—and who doesn't become childish idling day after day across an empty sea—you can play all sorts of tricks with this. An eminent astronomer held a lugubrious funeral service over our "still-born day" and, literally ripping it out of the calendar, dropped it overboard—together with a lot of dead bottles to keep it company. We turned the band on and by one-stepping for ten minutes, from 11:55 P.M. to 12:5 A.M., could henceforth truthfully boast that we had danced from Tuesday to Thursday without stop, food, drink, or benefit of the clergy.

But our greatest find was a man who had lost his birthday. We collected an imposing show of presents and made speeches in his honour. Necromancers, alchemists, sorcerers since the creation, we said, had toiled night and day seeking some talisman, elixir or



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



abracadabra that should prolong life indefinitely. Fortunes had been thrown away, lives wasted, reputations pricked. And now, after all these centuries of futile research we had a man in our midst who had quite simply and unostentatiously demonstrated how it could be done. Was ever ship so honoured? Would Mr. Jones step forward, please? Let all present feast their eyes on Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones, vulgarly speaking, had got Eternity by the short hairs. He had got rid of his birthday. A man who had no birthday couldn't be any older. All Mr. Jones had to do was to arrange to reach the 180th Meridian, westward bound, on the eve of any future birthdays and he wouldn't have any. His age would remain stationary and he would live forever. All hail to Mr. Jones! However, having got rid of his birthday he could hardly expect to receive the many and costly birthday presents we had collected for him, and thereupon we tossed them overboard—after the other empties.

Mr. Jones, who was under the impression that they were full, looked truly disappointed. Nevertheless he pulled himself together and replied. He said that despite the lost day he was all square at the moment, for, some years previously, he had crossed the date-line on the eve of his birthday eastward-bound and consequently had two. It was a convivial ship and the passengers had insisted on celebrating both of them, with the result that Mr. Jones' birthday very nearly proved to be his deathday also. He thanked us for comparing him favourably with Newton and Einstein, but he was afraid his discovery had come too late to be of much use to himself. Once upon a time when he was a strapping, handsome young fellow, the admiration of ladies, the envy of men, he would have been only too pleased to live forever. But now when



his forehead and his parting seemed to have run together, when he could hardly call his teeth his own and lumbago fetched him a kick in the back whenever he bent, eternity had lost its appeal. An eternity of lumbago! No, thank you! Not for himself. But anybody else was welcome to make use of his find; he would charge no royalty. And now would we please excuse him, for though he might have eternity in his hands he had also lumbago in his back—and was going to bed.

With such and other fooleries time passed swiftly on.

I have never started on a voyage yet without laying in a stock of paper, heavy reading and good intentions and swearing to put in some real hard work—and never yet have I done a stroke. There is nothing to do aboard ship and yet I never seem to get an idle moment—and even if I do, something steals over me.

You start breakfast (with luck) at nine. Fellows straggle down one after the other and what with yarns, arguments and one thing and another it is half-past ten and the stewards dragging the chairs out from under you, before you've finished. A dozen turns round the deck and a set or two of tennis to shake down the breakfast and then it's time for a set or two of tennis and a dozen turns round the deck to get up an appetite for lunch. After lunch comes a period of suspended animation and I go down to my cabin, pick up my heavy reading and—something steals over me and the next thing I am aware of is the clamour of the tea-gong. This never happens to me ashore; it is most inexplicable and distressing. I took a weighty tome along with me on my travels and in eight months the marker moved exactly two pages—from the first to the second.



After tea everybody is up and active. You've got to make up a shuffle-board four from five to six and a tennis four from six to seven. There is no getting out of it. Girls with beautiful pleading eyes trip up and say they simply can't find a fourth and you simply must join in. If there were any possible alternative you may be sure they wouldn't have invited you, but there simply isn't and if you don't come their afternoon will be simply ruined. After dinner there they are again, looking still more beautiful and pleading, tapping their toes in time with the music, and after the last dance has finished there is your cabin-mate saying, "Those two Peking fellows are up in the smoking-room. Let's take 'em on again and get some of our money back!" Added to these are concerts, sports and fancy dress affairs and then, suddenly you are at your destination and everybody is saying, "Hope we meet again!", trusting privately that we never shall.

One evening I happened to notice a lump on the horizon where none had been before.

"Hello!" said I. "An island; two, three islands!"

"Some of the Bonins, I suppose," said a bystander.

"Bonins! B-but they're off Japan!"

"Sure they are," said the man. "Where did you expect 'em to be? Off Cape Cod?"

Of course I knew where they were, only I hadn't realised where we were. Why, we should be in Kobe next day! . . . and that heavy reading . . . hardly a page!

We passed close beside one of the islets, a gloomy heap of black rock and rank vegetation, its head swathed in smoky cloud, an island of ghostly legend, the haunt of dragons and evil genii; and the next morning there was Japan in sober earnest, reeling out to starboard like a colour-print, valleys and pine-covered



THE PACIFIC



hills, the sea covered with sampans with single masts stepped right aft, slipping merrily along before the breeze, looking for all the world like a school of nautili. I shaved staring out of the porthole, giving myself some unmerciful gashes.

By three o'clock we had steamed through the Yurakiakyo narrows into the Inland Sea and as an orange sunset smouldered out behind the Harima hills were docking in Kobe harbour. Half an hour later I was being trundled swiftly along between rows of lighted shops stuffed with curious wares and hung with more curious banners, my motive-power a sturdy yellow person in a mushroom hat who swung a paper lantern on one rickshaw shaft and clanged a bicycle-bell on the other. This was the East at last!

CHAPTER IV

JAPAN

In Kobe station, my luck being in, I saw a sight. A lemon-coloured individual wearing a brown kimono, horn-rimmed spectacles and a Derby hat slid up to me, removed the hat, bowed till I thought he'd snap off at the waist, and asked me if I would like to see the most beautiful woman in Japan. I replied that nothing would give me greater pleasure—but I was catching the Tokyo Express in a minute or two. He said that that would be all right, he was catching it himself. The lady was on the spot, in the station. Would I follow him, please?

He had the most beautiful lady backed up into a corner of the waiting-room, corralled behind a fence of baggage like some precious zoological specimen. I do not generally admire Japanese women; they have no figures, to speak of, and look as if a bee had stung them in the eye, but this was indeed a charming little creature. She bloomed in her dirty corner like a tea-rose on a rubbish-heap. Her gorgeous kimono was embroidered from top to bottom with sprays of wisteria and hydrangea; her bunched obi with white and gold chrysanthemums. Her blue-black hair, freshly oiled, shone like patent-leather and was arranged in elaborate loops, knobs and arches, fastened with glittering combs and pins. Her face was blanched dead-white with rice-powder and touched on the cheeks with rouge.

The work-soiled, draggle-tailed country women



loll'd over the baggage fence, staring at her open-mouthed. She was like what they had once hoped to be, perhaps, in their forgotten girlish dreams, a goddess, a fairy princess, a being too exquisite, too lovely for this drab world.

Her proprietor flourished his hat towards her, exuding pride from every pore. She was a film actress, he told me, and he was taking her to Kyoto to work in a studio there. He called on us to observe her charm, pointing out her perfections with the end of his umbrella. He might have been a ballyhoo showman exhibiting a pink giraffe. Then he was gone again to beat up another crowd to admire his treasure. "Walk up! Walk up and see the most beautiful lady in Japan!!"

And the treasure, how did she enjoy being penned up in a murky corner, being treated like some strange zoological specimen? She was tickled to pieces. She smiled and dimpled and simpered and made funny little bobs in acknowledgment of our admiration. What was the use of being the most beautiful woman in Japan if one blushed unseen? Let 'em look! Let 'em all come! Walk up!

Faking in flowery Nippon is a sacred cult, a religion. Your conscientious Japanese will spend more money imitating an article (providing it be foreign) than it would cost him to buy the original. At dinner in the train that night we ordered a bottle of Sauterne, guaranteed, according to the label, grown in France by the Sauternese. I am no judge of wine, but I can tell Sauterne from coal-oil and saccharine, so I put the bottle from me—out of the window, to be precise. We then ordered a bottle of Pommard, guaranteed, according to the label, of the purest Burgundian pedigree. The American in whose company I was dining



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



sent the second bottle after the first, saying that, in his opinion, it was a subtle blend of Condyl's Fluid and blood. I am no great blood drinker myself, so I cannot say, but if that's what blood tastes like the vampire is deserving of sympathy. We passed the whisky by, as probably compounded of vitriol and dynamite, and came upon saki.

Saki is an indigenous beverage, the only thing that I ever heard of that the Jap has invented all by his little self—his culture is lifted wholesale from China, his modernity from the West. Deeming it unlikely that even he would pirate his own *chef d'œuvre*, we ordered saki. The Japanese can rest assured that no matter how many inventions he snaffles from other people his own is perfectly safe. Saki will protect itself. If ever I want to be reminded of Japan I shall chew a mouthful of burnt straw and immediately I shall be back in the Tokyo Express drinking saki.

In Japanese sleeping-cars you sleep (or don't) between two mattresses and know how it feels to be the ham in a sandwich. It is the mattresses or nothing; you cannot adjust your covering to the temperature. I climbed into the top berth, which had been made up for me, and went to sleep. Before long I woke up in a bath of sweat, so I kicked the top mattress off and went to sleep again, to wake up shivering shortly after.

"Hot air rises," thought I. "It'll be cooler in the lower bunk and there, maybe, I'll be able to stand the mattress."

I thereupon transferred my bedding to the lower bunk and once more fell asleep. It was still too hot, so I got out and wrestled with the window with the idea of opening a chink of it. I succeeded beyond my intentions, ninety per cent of the glass falling with a crash on the line. After that, a hurricane blast blow-



ing directly into the lower bunk, I was forced to shift the bedding to the upper once again. What with climbing up and down from berth to berth dragging the mattress after me, and frequent excursions along the cold corridor to the water-tap with the idea of cleansing my mouth of the amalgamated taste of coal-oil, saccharine, permanganate of potash, blood and burnt straw, I spent a restless night.

On my eleventh—it may have been my twelfth, I was losing count by this time—pilgrimage to the tap I noticed that day was on us and that the train was standing still. I glanced out of the window and there, in a snapshot, was all Japan! Plodding along the road, hoe on shoulder, was a labourer in a conical straw hat and a blue coat covered with cryptic lettering. Beyond him, seen through a frame of decorative pines, miles of paddy-fields with storks meditating knee-deep in mist, and beyond them again, pure as marble, delicately touched with light as though dawn were greeting her with a chaste salutation—Fujiyama.

The Japanese do their busy best to work Fujiyama to death. They use her to fill up the backgrounds of their pictures, slap her on fans, screens, and pottery, outline her in imitation Toledo-work on cigarette-cases, boxes and trays, stick her on hotel note-paper, advertisements, trademarks and theatre back-cloths. If they could cheapen her they would, but they can't. "Her," I say, for she is essentially feminine. In height she is insignificant. Among the brute majesty of the Canadian Rockies she would be lost. It is her complete isolation that makes her. She is a woman, I say, a virgin queen, exquisitely symmetrical, radiantly white, serene as death. I kissed my hand to her out of the window as the train moved on and felt somehow snubbed—which was no more than I deserved; one



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



should not—clad in pyjamas, hair on end—go kissing one's hand to queens.

Lily-maid of mountains, dreaming all alone,
With the clouds about you and pines below,
What is it you dream of on your silver throne?
In your flowing mantle of unsullied snow?

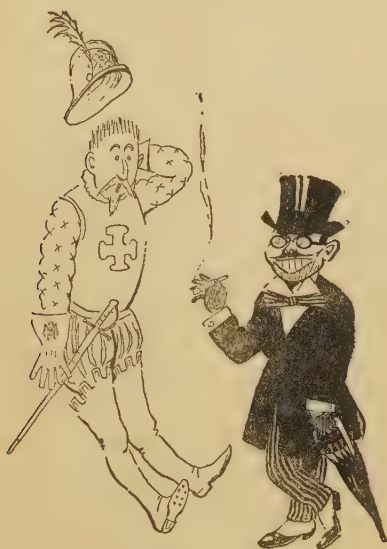
Little, lovely, lonely one, what is it you seek?
Sigh you for your loneliness behind the cloudy bars?
Patience, sweet, the dawn will come and kiss you on the cheek,
Night will fold you to him and crown you with his stars.

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A friend of mine was in the earthquake of 1924 and related his experiences at dinner one night in that fantastic hostelry which is Tokyo's chief pride, the Imperial Hotel. He was in a street-car going down to Yokohama when the car suddenly gave a lurch and went bumping along the rails in a most unsettling manner. He thought some one had put stones on the line, and grabbed for a strap. As he did so, he saw the house roofs fall off all together. Came another lurch and all the walls fell in, as though on hinges. He said he wasn't in the least scared—for the moment. The whole thing was too unreal, like the transformation scene in a pantomime, an entire city falling flat, in, literally, a brace of shakes. He had seen towns knocked out in France, but then they had gone wall by wall and house by house accompanied by the roar of shells and deluges of bricks and mortar, but in this case, for him, Tokyo collapsed quite silently—the din the street-car was making, clashing about on the rails, drowned all other noises. It was altogether too theatrical, too preposterous. He thought his eyes were



playing tricks with him, he simply didn't believe them. Only when the car gave up business altogether and he stepped out, felt the ground kick beneath his feet and saw the devastated capital enveloped in a growing ring of smoke (the electric cables fused) did he begin to realise what had happened. Whereupon he finished the sixteen miles afoot, his sole possessions what he stood up in—a pair of tennis shoes and a pongee suit—to find Yokohama in a worse state even than Tokyo.



Antonio de Moto rediscovers Japan.

The Japanese, putting their faith in ferroconcrete, are rebuilding with admirable courage and energy, but it will be some time before Tokyo rises from its ashes in anything like its former state. At present half the streets are up and the place, with its temporary wooden shacks fluttering with gaily lettered banners, has the



appearance of a vast but dilapidated fair. There was nothing to see, barring a few temples that could be bettered at Kyoto, so I went on to Nikko.

Breakfastless, unprovided with lunch and the train containing no restaurant-car, I was forced to sustain life by means of food boxes purchased from wayside venders. Some contained boiled rice, others collections of assorted titbits. Certain of these were undoubtedly cockscombs, others appeared to be slices of root, others again were unidentifiable. There is no connection between my palate and my imagination; a broken nose and subsequent reconstruction has rendered my sense of smell almost negligible. There is nothing in the Chinaman's bill of fare, from birds' nests to shark's fin, that can deter me. I consider frogs' legs overrated, but could write a sonnet to snails, properly done, with garlic. I have eaten with avidity horse, monkey, guinea-pig, tortoise and octopus. A chain of distressing incidents centring on a pig has given me to believe that at one time I practised a diluted form of cannibalism. From this it will be understood that I am not fanciful in my diet, but in those Japanese dainties I met my Waterloo.

I chewed and chewed at the cockscombs; they might have been so much india-rubber. I munched and scrunched at the roots; they were as succulent as door-mats. I bit and tore at the unidentifiable oddments and my teeth rebounded. With a polite speech I handed the residue to a dog and left him concentrating on what would probably develop into a life-work. The result was that I went to Nikko on a diet of Tan San water and boiled rice, a circumstance under which even the Kingdom of Heaven would hardly appear at its brightest and best. I was prepared to hate Nikko—and was enchanted.



Nikko is dedicated to Saint Shôdô, who made his way thither eleven hundred and fifty-nine years before I did. Saints are people of discrimination. You do not find them setting up in business in such places as Harlem or Burslem. The moment they determine to be good they head for some historic beauty-spot or tourist centre, stake a claim and throw off an odour of sanctity. Witness St. Francis of Assisi, St. Pol de Leon, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Januarius of Naples, St. Mark of Venice (I could go on like this for hours, but as I don't get paid by the word there's no object in it), etc., etc., and *ad lib*. And what could be more sensible? Beauty engenders beautiful thoughts and the tourists help with the offertory.

Shôdô's journey was not without incident. Four miraculous clouds accompanied him on his way and when he reached the Daiyagawa river it was in raging flood. He knelt down and prayed. Instantly a colossal being with red dishevelled hair and a necklace of skulls appeared on the farther bank and flung a pair of snakes, one red and one green, across the cañon. The snakes intertwined, forming a bridge, and the Saint passed over and up the hillside to found the Monastery of the Four Dragons, as abbot of which he died, highly respected, at the age of eighty-two.

Blessed be the name of good Saint Shôdô! He founded beauty in beauty. Blessed be the snakes who helped him over. Their act has been commemorated by a bridge of red lacquer flung across the gorge in the exact spot where they flung their devoted bodies.

Nikko is a mountain village, snow-peaks capped with cloud tower over it. There is the winey tang of high altitudes in the air. The Daiyagawa comes brawling and foaming down the narrow valley green with snow-



water; waterfalls come tumbling off the hillsides chill as ice. Its village straggles in a single street along one bank. It is of no special interest by day, except for the merry children tottering about on stilts, but at night the paper windows light up and you see human shapes moving in silhouette behind them so that the whole place becomes one long fascinating shadow-show.

Its people do not, as in the large towns, assume Western attire and trot about with the sad mimicry of performing apes, but wear the suitable picturesque costume of the country. They are, moreover, natural, friendly and wear their sense of humour uppermost. Touch it ever so lightly and they are off, laughing fit to split themselves. I very nearly wiped out three generations of a Nikko family one night.

Wishing to buy a common porter coat, I wandered down the village and entered a humble shop. An old man, bobbing like an automaton, came out of some dark recess and demanded my wishes. I speaking no Japanese, he nothing else, the explanation presented difficulties. I started by examining his shelves in the hope of finding what I wanted. Not being successful, I tried to make him catch the idea by showing him the coat I was wearing. He nodded intelligently, fetched down a brown kimono and when I declined that, a spotted one.

By this time he had been joined by his wife, two sons, three daughters and a daughter-in-law carrying two babies, twins. They were all very nice. The oddly dressed foreigner with eyes set horizontally instead of in the correct oblique, pacing up and down the shop reiterating unintelligible sounds, had plainly got something on his mind and they made every effort to relieve it. They fetched me this and they fetched me that with infinite patience and good humour. They



conferred amongst themselves and fetched more things, turning the little shop inside out and upside down—all to no purpose: the funny foreigner still gesticulated and blathered. I was like a peevish child, unable to explain where the ache is, everybody hazarding different remedies.

Getting out a pencil, I snatched up a piece of paper and drew a porter coat. As a comic work, my drawing succeeded beyond anything I have achieved before or since. They passed my sketch from hand to hand chuckling delightedly, finding points of humour in it entirely unintentional on my part—but producing no porter coat.

I led the old lady aside and went through the motions of putting on a coat. She wiped the happy tears from her eyes and gave a little squeak of understanding. "Of course!" In a second she had jerked a striped kimono out of a packet and hustled me into it. The merriment soared from chuckles to open laughter. The funny foreigner in a kimono! How intensely comic! Like dressing up a monkey!

In despair, I acted the porter, laid my stick across my shoulder and staggered up and down the shop as though bent under a heavy load. That brought down the house, they howled, wept, wriggled with joy, clapped their hands and shouted for more. Finally the little mother thrust her young into my arms. I have an idea she thought I would juggle with them, keep them both in the air at once, turning over and over as certain gifted people can do with knives and oranges. I'm sure the twins would not have minded, for even they were laughing. Jolly little brats with stiff black hair, slit eyes and faces like polished wax, stuffed out with layers of brightly coloured kimonos. They lay in my arms bubbling merrily as if to say,



"Chuck us up, Mister! Do your tricks! Don't let the fun stop!"

However, I thought it high time the fun did stop. Grandpa was throwing something in the nature of a fit in one corner, Grandma in another, while the rest of the family were in advanced hysterics. I handed the Gemini back to their trustful mamma and fled—coatless. I like to think that one humble Nikko family remembers me kindly as an absurd foreign person who bounced in out of the night and performed a kind of one-man variety show in the shop, all for their private amusement, and all for nothing.

So much for the village—I suppose there are a thousand others just like it scattered over Nippon; the glory of Nikko lies on the opposite bank. The steep mountainside is grown thick with immense cryptomeria-trees, and here and there in the solemn green forest aisles are set red lacquer pagodas dedicated to the Thousand-headed Kwannon, the Horse-headed Kwannon, the Ten Cannibal Demons, and the Goddess Hariti, who loved little children so dearly that she ate them. Some of the temples are approached by mounting avenues lined by stone lanterns overgrown with moss, spanned by giant torii of bronze or stone. Others you come on unexpectedly. You walk through quiet woods where nothing is to be heard save the burble of a pigeon or the splash of a distant waterfall, so quiet that at every moment you expect to see spotted deer peeping shyly round a tree-trunk. Then—*Boo . . . m . . . m . . . m!*—the rumble of a bronze gong goes echoing away among the hills, and there before you is some temple of the gods, built apparently of red sealing-wax and gilt filigree, blood-red among the greenery. Marvellous temples they are, guarded by wonderful gates which in their turn are guarded by



gilt monsters with blue and green manes, Ama Inu and Koma Inu; by the terrible genii of storms, scowling and scarlet, the one with his wind-bag over his shoulder, the other grasping brazen thunderbolts; or by the golden archers, Sadaijin and Udaijin, sitting serene and watchful, combs in their hair, bows ready on their knees.

The roofs of the guarded gates are lifted high on a mass of carving so delicately chiselled, so richly embellished, as to have the appearance more of jewel-work than wood. Every projecting beam-end is the head of an elephant, trunk upraised, or a fretted brass dragon with a gaping crimson mouth. Between these are carved panels of Chinese sages, or of children at play in flowery fields, blissfully indifferent to the snarling monsters. Bronze dragons gape heavenwards from the roof-ridges, bronze bells dangle from the eave-corners, metallicallly murmurous with every gust that blows.

There are carvings everywhere, set in panels between the stout red pillars, set in dados and frescos along the fences, gates, temples, sacred libraries, stables and treasure-houses. Every species of flower, bird, beast and legendary monster has been utilised in the design. White tree-peonies, red magnolias, golden chrysanthemums, lotus, bamboo and pine; peacocks, pheasants, swans, bullfinches and doves; deer, horses, elephants and rabbits, all gambolling prettily among an extravagant foliage of leaf and bud and blossom.

Everywhere is the legendary dragon and everywhere the three asarum leaves, crest of that great family of Shoguns, the Tokugawa. On the treasure-house is a carving representing the three famous Nikko monkeys, those paragons of discretion. The first with his fingers in his ears, the second with his hands to his



mouth, the third with his hands to his eyes, hearing, speaking and seeing no evil. Elsewhere, carved by Japan's most celebrated artist with his left hand, sleeping luxuriously in a bed of flowers, is the sacred piebald cat which preserves the temples from mice.

Taking off my shoes, I paddled round that holy of holies, the Oratory of Iyeyasu, where, under an aloes-wood ceiling, portraits of the thirty-six poetical genii solemnly contemplate a fresco of chrysanthemums and



The Nikko Monkeys.

phoenix. An aged Shinto priest in an apple-green robe and a black varnished straw hat accompanied me. I was acutely conscious of a hole in my sock through which my big toe persisted in protruding, but the old fellow was too much of a gentleman to take any notice and was, in fact, very kind and on my departure presented me with a little box decorated with the ever-present asarum leaves. On my way home I sat down in a quiet spot and opened the box. It contained two slabs of sugar, one pink, one white. I ate them there and then, hoping that it was blessed sugar and that I



JAPAN



should obtain spiritual benefit thereby. Blessed or not, it was rank bad sugar—but no matter. In the words of the Presbyterian minister, rendering thanks for a parochial gift of brandied cherries, it was not so much the gift he appreciated “as the spirit in which it was given.”

CHAPTER V

SOUTHWARD

I boarded a ship in a blinding rainstorm in Kobe one night and woke up to find the packet wriggling through a passage so strait it looked as though, did she come broadside to the stream, she would bridge the narrows from bank to bank. In some places the Inland Sea tries to live up to the dignity of its title and opens out to thirty or forty miles, but in others it pinches in to a matter of yards. All day long we were dodging islands—long islands, short islands, islands flat, islands steep, islands bulbous or conical, all covered with pine-trees; the whole hemmed in by hills like terraced dunes and beyond them arid mountain ranges. Coastwise vessels scudded by, their slatted sails wing-a-wing before the whistling blast. Sampans, fishing, dotted the flurried waters. By nightfall we had passed a second gut—the lights of Shimonoseki glittering close on one side, Moji on the other—and were out into the Yellow Sea. The Black Sea, I am told, is anything but black; the White Sea an intense indigo. The Opal Sea, when I crossed it, was like diluted ink, the Zuider Zee more like stale beer than cider. But the Yellow Sea never forgets that it is Chinese and is undoubtedly yellow—or was all that stormy day we went plunging across it—frothing white with breaker-tops, blurred with dark rain squalls, but yellow in the main, owing, they tell me, to the mud brought down by the Yangtse floods.

That night I had the misfortune to light upon a



bridge partner who was incapable of saying "No." Regardless that the highest card we held between us was the jack of clubs he kept on bidding as though both his sleeves were lined with aces. His tenacity was rewarded in that we struggled out winners of a rubber, but at a cost which would allow our opponents to retire for life. I tried to entice the fellow out for a stroll on deck with the idea of throwing him overboard, but instinct warned him to seek his berth. I therefore strolled forward alone. The ship was still rolling, but not so heavily. Away in the windy darkness to port a light flashed and died and flashed again. Some lightship or lighthouse. Farther to the southeast was another. I leaned against the rail and watched them. It was my first glimpse of China.

Shanghai is very kind to visitors. I went ashore after breakfast, took a rickshaw along the Bund and poked my nose into the lobby of the Astor House. Everybody I had met since leaving San Francisco seemed to be there. One of them came and sat down beside me.

"Have you got a notebook?" she said. "Because I've fixed up engagements for you for the next three weeks and I guess you'd better jot them down."

I did not stay three weeks; after three days I crept quietly out of the hotel, bag in hand, and shipped myself south. Said I to the Chinese steward, "I'm going to Hongkong, savvy? Don't wake me till I get there." Then I turned in and slept and slept.

Shanghai is by many lengths the gayest spot in Asia. The Saturday night balls at the Majestic are as pleasant affairs as I have been to—anywhere. The floor is sunken and in the centre there is a sort of fountain with a white Venus atop around which coloured lights glow with a pretty effect. The only disadvantage



about the fountain is that its basin is a trifle low and if you back into it unwarily the coping takes you under the hocks and you sit down in the basin, turning, at one squat, goldfish into flatfish—as happened on the night I was there to a certain lady in a clinging orange dress. When she emerged the dress clung tighter than ever, but she marched off the floor with the most admirable composure, doubtless fortified by the knowledge that her figure was nothing to be ashamed of. Most of the contestants were British, but there was a good sprinkling of rich Chinese. The youths wore dinner-jackets, but the girls wore their national dress, and very charming they looked with their serene faces, sleek black hair fastened with silver pins and stuck with artificial flowers. Their jackets were mainly of rich brocade costing thousands of dollars and fastened all down the side with diamond buttons. Enigmatic little sylphs, slender as willows, who appeared to drift rather than dance.

Shanghai's chief club is a lordly affair and boasts the longest bar on earth. I forget its exact length, but three laps round it equals two of Epsom race-course—or something of the sort. Standing up to the bar of the American Club for thirty minutes at the sacred cocktail hour is equal to four rounds with comrade Tunney—or thereabouts. The French Club—but this will never do!—nothing but dances, hotels and clubs, tut-tut! Let us pass on to the historical, architectural, botanical and antiquarian aspects of Shanghai.

The race-course is situated on Bubbling Well—but there we go again! Truth to tell, I know nothing of the historical, antiquarian, etc., aspects of Shanghai; I saw it only by night. If any one should ask me what clothing it was necessary to take there I should answer, "Dress-clothes and pyjamas—nothing else." I wore



nothing else myself. In the middle hours of morning I exchanged my dinner-jacket for pyjamas and only woke up when it was time to crawl into my dinner-jacket again. As I said, after three days, or rather nights, of it I crept away.

Aboard ship I met a man who stayed even a shorter time, something under eighteen hours. He landed off a Tientsin boat at six P.M., went up to the club to find a fellow he knew, missed him, but fell in with an agreeable stranger who asked him to dinner. At dinner there was a large party, greatly enlivened by a Kentuckian whom we will call Piggott, a plump friendly creature with a snub nose. After dinner they all went on to the Majestic and enjoyed themselves hugely, Piggott further distinguishing himself. At two o'clock or thereabouts, the dance coming to an end, Flamboro prepared to seek his hotel, but Piggott had other ideas. "Don't go home!" he implored. "The night is yet young!" Flamboro, having nothing to go home for, announced himself Piggott's man and off they went to another hotel where dancing was still in progress. At three o'clock, approximately, the second dance called a finish and Flamboro announced his intention of going to bed. Piggott was astonished and pained.

"Why? What for? Aren't you enjoyin' yourself? Whatcher want to go to bed for at this hour? The night is yet young."

Flamboro replied that he was enjoying himself immensely, but he thought the festivities had come to an end. Piggott was scornful. "Come to an end at this time of night! Holy snakes! where d'you think you are? Coyote City, Kansas?—or London? You come with me, Buddy; stick tight to Uncle George!"

Whereupon they embarked in Uncle George's car and drove for leagues and leagues. Flamboro had no

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

notion where they were going to and it was no use asking Piggott, for by this time he was fast asleep, curled up in the corner like some plump, blonde guinea-pig. When at length the car did stop, Flamboro thinks it was on the borders of Thibet. He woke Piggott, who removed his nose from his shirt-front, walked straight



Dark Eyebrows and Top-boots.

into the dance-hall, sat down at a table, beamed all round him and fell asleep again.

The dance-hall was large, with lattice-work boxes all round. The clientèle were a pretty mouldy looking lot; they danced with Russian charmers from Harbin provided by the Chinese management. Flamboro chose one of the prettiest, a fair wench wearing dark eye-



brows, and top-boots. Flamboro thinks her father must have been a Cossack and these last were all the poor girl inherited from him. They danced together, Flamboro getting somewhat tangled up in the boots. He tried to converse with her in six languages, but there was nothing doing; to everything he said she had but one reply, "Schmabotaschampay," after the manner of Wordsworth's tedious girl friend in "We are Seven." The conversation then lapsed and they performed five dances in silence, Flamboro dodging the paternal boots with varying success.

By this time, having been making Terpsichorean rings around one woman or another for eight consecutive hours, he was beginning to feel hungry, so he sat the girl down at a table, at which she presented him with an account for two and a half dollars, five dances at fifty cents a whirl. He paid the bill and asked her if she would like any refreshment. "Schmabotaschampay," said she.

Flamboro, who had an idea that the mystic word referred in some way to the boots, was properly non-plussed—she couldn't possibly want 'em fried, or devilled or anything? However, he was not long left in ignorance, for at a sign from the charmer a Chinese appeared with the goods on a tray. It was a small bottle of champagne she wanted. Flamboro paid for the bottle, contenting himself with ham and eggs.

Having made a fool of one bottle the lady again produced the master word in the hopes of getting a second. Flamboro offered her some of his ham and eggs instead, but they were not to her taste and she intimated that unless he could make himself more spirituously agreeable she would like to go and schmabotaschampay somebody else. He answered that she was at liberty to go the moment she chose, at the same time

saying how grateful and stimulated he felt by their all too brief association.

She replied by rendering him a second account, for the six dances she had missed while drinking his champagne.

The Russians have been much maligned; there are people who condemn them wholesale as shiftless, thriftless, incendiaries with no higher capabilities whatever—except for the preserving of caviare and the writing of novels in which all the characters die of lingering tuberculosis or in-growing vodka. This is unjust. The Far East at this moment swarms with bright, hard-working little Russian women who, for intensive business methods and acumen, could take the suspender buttons off an East Side Jew of Scotch extraction.

But to return to our dance-hall. Flamboro, having finished his pig and poached, was at a loose end. He was on the point of waking up Piggott and bearing him, willy-nilly, back to bed, when a party of British and Americans entered, evidently on a circuitous way home after a fancy-dress ball in that foolish way people have of going on and on though it kills them and is called "making a night of it." They went into one of the boxes and ordered ham and eggs. Flamboro, feeling lonesome, joined them at his own invitation; but there was no entertainment to be had; they were all too tired for words, danced clean out. One woman, dressed as a Greek slave, made a gallant attempt to be gay; yawns stifled her. A man in a harlequin's costume began a humorous story; but forgot the point. A columbine let her head droop on a bull-fighter's shoulder, her food untouched.

"Ann's asleep," said the Greek slave, yawning.

"No wonder," said the Glasgow harlequin. "It's her sixth night running."



"It's my fourth," said the Greek slave. "Oo-ooow!"

"I beat you all by a couple," said a Milwaukee gladiator. "Say! lift Sam's nose out of the mustard, somebody; he'll drown."

Flamboro gently removed a strange lady's head from his bosom and went to find Piggott.

"The night," muttered that gentleman without opening his eyes, "is yet young!"—but was nevertheless led without further protest to his car, where he immediately resumed his slumbers. Flamboro, returning for Piggott's hat, found that sleep had got the fancy-dress party hard and fast.

"Bon soir," he whispered, turned away—and then turned back. Dawn was breaking, the place would be closing soon. The men probably had money on them—free pickings for the Chinese waiters. Several of the women displayed trinkets that might prove too attractive to the Harbin charmers. Without further ado, he roused them sufficiently and led them, blinking and stumbling, to the waiting cars outside.

"But how did you know in which cars to put which?" I asked.

"I didn't," said he. "And they were too sleepy to know or care. I stowed 'em as the fancy moved me, in pairs. I put the columbine with the harlequin as is proper, the gladiator chap with the Greek slave because they both had freckles—and so forth. They just fell into each other's arms and went off home like that, fast asleep again."

I chuckled. "Snakes! a dozen casually assorted couples clasped in each other's arms rolling into town in broad daylight! You may have raised some pretty domestic whirlwinds in Shanghai. There may be fellows calling at your hotel with shotguns—do you realise that?"



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



He nodded. "Yes, it did occur to me—and that's why I left rather hurriedly next morning. Sorry, in a way. Seemed jolly spot, Shanghai."

We were steaming southwest into the sun's glitter over a plain of pale turquoise. On the starboard horizon island succeeded island, strung out like low bronze clouds, rounded or jagged. Inshore a coasting steamer trailed a filthy smoke ribbon across the sky. Further out bobbed a fleet of fishing sampans, each with a single brown sail. Two Filipinos played shuffleboard, listlessly, speaking never a word. A small English boy played trains along the deck, watched by a minute Japanese nurse in a magenta kimono. In a long chair a Chinese lady sat and slept, jade bracelets on her arms, pearls in her ears, black hair raked back from a forehead of polished ivory. So still, so colourless was she, she might have been dead. There was no sound save the steady hiss of the bow-wave and the noise of a sailor on the boat-deck, chipping paint.

Formosa—"the beautiful"—lay, invisible, away to port. Foochow and the Min River lay somewhere behind the screen of cloudy islands—Foochow and the Pagoda Anchorage, starting-place of the classic tea races. From behind those islands the clippers came, shaking out their cloth, royals, skysails, stunsails and flying kites, opening out like flowers, like white sea-lilies. Down this strait they swept on their twelve thousand mile race home. Previous to 1834 the tea went to England in the leisurely "Sou'-Spainers" of the Honourable East India Company. Their captains were largely recruited from officers of the Royal Navy, wore blue coats with black velvet cuffs and collars embroidered in gold, buff breeches and waistcoats, cocked hats and side-arms. They were allowed each two per-



sonal servants and, among other things, eleven tons of wine per voyage. Their pay was good and in addition they were allowed private trade, £8,000 to £10,000 being looked on as ordinary profits for a single China voyage, but as much as £30,000 is recorded. From this the value of the main cargo may be judged.

It is said that the devout Scilly Islanders used every Sunday to pray the Lord to send them a wreck, adding that, were it convenient, could He, in His bountiful goodness, make it an Indiaman, please. As an argument for the efficacy of prayer, it may be added that in 1680 the Honourable Company thought fit to erect and maintain the first lighthouse on those islands.

Naval discipline was enforced on the old Indiamen, if necessary with a rawhide cat-o'-nine-tails. Gun, cutlass, musket, and boarding drill were held daily; a pirate, privateer, or even man-o'-war, thought twice and thrice before attacking them. In 1804 the Company's home-bound China fleet set on a superior French squadron in the Straits of Malacca and, what is more, gave it a sound drubbing.

They were comfortable for their day and put to sea with decks stocked like a farm-yard. Milch cows in pens, sheep in the launch, calves and goats in the barge, fowls, ducks and turkeys in coops, all a-clucking and a-gobbling, pigs and rabbits in the manger—a wet berth when the cable came in!

Robust, imposing craft they were, the old John Company frigates, bullocking along before the monsoons, their double tiers of gun-ports chequered black and white, tompions painted scarlet, their beaks carved into effigies of Indian rajahs, or Company directors, hammocks lashed along the bulwarks, huge wooden-stocked anchors, stern-walks and bright ginger-bread work. Apple-cheeked, arrogant old waggons, splen-

didly manned, safely if cautiously navigated, taking in all upper sails at nightfall regardless of weather. With them security was everything and time of secondary importance.

In 1834 the Company's charter expired, competitors appeared in the field and things began to hum, Americans setting so brisk a pace that, for a time, none could stay with them. The first of the thoroughbred clippers was a vessel called the *Rainbow*, built to the revolutionary designs of John Griffiths, of New York. Ancient mariners, inspecting the experiments, declared that she had been turned inside out, would capsize, dive to the bottom, etc., etc., hopefully prophesying disaster, as is the fashion with old gentlemen the world over when confronted with any novelty. The *Rainbow* confounded her critics by thrashing round Cape Stiff, from New York to Canton in ninety-two days and back in eighty-eight—an unheard-of time.

Following her, built on the same lines, came the famous *Sea Witch*, also of New York, carrying skysails, royal stunsails, ring-tails and every possible form of flying kite. Under the notorious bucko, Waterman, she ran from Canton to New York in eighty-one days on one occasion, in seventy-eight on another. The California gold stampede gave fresh impetus to the building of American clippers, would-be Bonanza kings paying anything for a quick passage round Cape Horn. New York and Boston shipyards buzzed, in the former W. H. Webb leading the field, in the latter that mastercraftsman Donald Mackay.

Surprise, *Honqua*, *Staghound*—launched in midwinter with all the bells of Boston pealing—*Sea Serpent*, *Sword Fish*, *N. B. Palmer*, *Witch of the Wave* (pride of Salem), *Flying Cloud*, with her double record of eighty-nine days to the Golden Gate—all these names



were synonymous with speed, daring navigation and man hazing. They were far bigger ships than the British, had tremendous sheer and spread of canvas and very sharp lines and were holystoned, scraped and painted, holystoned and scraped again—often by moonlight—till the men dropped dead of exhaustion.

They were driven along mercilessly day and night, come fair come foul, till their lighter spars went by the board, whereupon they luffed up, re-rigged at sea, and pelted on again. In a few years they were strained, water-logged, wornout, but in their heyday they romped from port to port, half their crews in irons, maimed or booted overboard, it is true, but with new records in their teeth.

Their climax was reached with the New York *Challenge*. According to Captain Clarke's "Clipper Ship Era," "Her mainyard was ninety feet in length and the lower studding sail booms were sixty feet long. With square yards and lower studding sails set the distance from boom-end to boom-end was one hundred and sixty feet. She carried 12,780 running yards of cotton canvas." Her tonnage was 2,006 and she was the sharpest ship afloat. On her first voyage she was commanded by the genial Waterman, who took pistol shots at his men on the yard-arms, beat men unconscious for having dirty hands, murdered an Italian because the old cripple could not go aloft, and ended up preaching the Gospel in Solano County, California.

The Yankee marvels, poorly manned but wonderfully officered, carried all before them. In 1850 the Sam Hill flyer *Surprise* loaded tea for London at double the rates offered to any British ships and the Liverpool Black Ball Line even commissioned Donald Mackay to build vessels for their Australian trade. But in the early eighteen fifties the slow-moving Brit-



ish, aided by the repeal of their antediluvian tonnage laws, were beginning to speed up. In 1852 the Black-wall *Challenger* beat the Yankee *Challenge* to London by two days. Next year the Aberdeen *Cairngorm* beat all comers, netting her owner £4,000 in stakes. In another four years the Americans were out of it altogether and the time was to come when the British tea-clippers were to reverse the order and successfully enter the New York trade. Nevertheless, it was the American who first showed the world how to drive a ship lee-rail under and the first out-and-out clipper was born on the stocks of Smith and Dimon, New York. To the United States belongs the honour.

Tea drinking was fast becoming the universal habit in England and in 1851 £1 a ton premium was offered for the first teas docked in London, £100 to the captain who brought it. Competition became red-hot. To own a winner was the desire of every sporting ship-owner. One old gentleman, hearing of the loss of his pet flyer, laid down quietly and died—broken-hearted. They ordered their favourite shipbuilders to turn out a world-beater regardless of expense and laid huge bets on the result. Racing captains were as sought after as leading jockeys to-day. They, too, bet. Crews of rival cracks laid a month's pay against each other. Clerks in the tea-houses and shipping-offices bet, shipwrights, riggers and chandlers. The interest became national. In the eighteen-sixties there was as much excitement in England over the result of the tea races as there is now over the Derby.

And the racers themselves—beautiful ships they were, sleek, eager thoroughbreds with curved entries, sharp as knives, topped with figure-heads of knights in armour, witches, dragons and family beauties; gold stripes running their entire length and gold scroll-work



over the counters. Their woodwork was of the finest teak or mahogany; blocks, yard-arms and lower masts painted white or flesh-colour, and brass, brass galore. It is recorded that the *Ariel's* brasswork occupied four men for twelve hours daily.

In 1860 Canton, Whampoa and Macao had been generally abandoned by the cracks in favour of Foo-chow. The tea came downriver in sampans and was loaded into the favourites first, coolies working all day and night. Then away the clippers went, cracking on aloft and aloft, through the Formosa Strait to the dread Paracels ("Many wrecks occur here," remarks the "China Sea Pilot" drily), then across to the Cochin-China coast to work the land breezes. From there to the Borneo coast for the same purpose. On through the Api Passage and Gaspar Strait, cutting off corners, scraping the very shores for wind, then out through the Sunda Strait and into the Indian Ocean. Tricky work! Glance at a chart of China Seas; it is dusted with reefs, banks and islands as though some one had shaken a pepper-pot over it. Add to these, pirates, uncharted reefs, reefs wrongly charted, typhoons, and currents which run contrary to sailing directions, and the affair seems more of an obstacle race than a speed contest.

In the classic race of 1866 Keay of the *Ariel* never undressed except for a tub, and slept on deck till clear of Java Head, and old Robertson of the *Cairngorm* went one better and slept on a chair on the poop all the way to London. A man who sailed with him told me that the great Dick Robinson of the *Fiery Cross* never slept at all, and if so with only one eye at a time.

Though there were desperate, keen races before and after, that of 1866 stands by itself for closeness of finish. Sixteen ships loaded in the Min River that

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

season, but the honour (and, incidentally, the prize money) was left to be battled out among the first five starters. The *Ariel*, *Taeping* and *Serica* got off the mark together, with the *Fiery Cross* fourteen hours ahead and the *Taitsing* thirty-six behind. The *Fiery Cross* passed through Sunda Strait her lead increased to two days. *Ariel*, *Taeping* and *Serica* passed through on the same day, the *Taitsing* four days later. All five then went straight across the Indian Ocean before the southeast Trades under every stitch of canvas they could hang out, stunsails, ring-tails, water-sails under the passeree booms, Jimmy Greens under the bowsprits and jib o' jibs on fore-royal stays.

They passed the longitude of Mauritius with *Fiery Cross* still leading, the *Ariel* and *Taeping* hard on her heels, only a day behind. The longitude of the Cape of Good Hope was passed with the *Ariel* closing nearer and nearer on the *Fiery Cross*, the *Taeping* closing on both. At St. Helena the *Taeping* had rushed to the lead, the *Fiery Cross* second and the *Serica*, which had done a marvellous spurt, third. At Ascension the *Serica* had dropped back, giving place to the *Ariel*. The first three ships crossed the Equator on the same day, *Taeping*, *Fiery Cross*, *Ariel*.

At Cape Verde Islands they had changed places again and the order was *Ariel*, *Taeping*, *Fiery Cross*, *Serica*, and not thirty-six hours between the lot. At the Azores they had closed to within twenty-four hours of each other, with the *Taitsing*, so long behind, ramping up hand over fist. But the final tussle was left to the *Ariel* and *Taeping*. They sighted each other off the Wolf light at daybreak and went tearing up the English Channel neck to neck, setting every possible stitch they could lay hands on. I have been told that the crew of the *Taeping* spread their blankets in the



rigging, dashed water over the sails to make them hold wind the better and even up-ended the boats in the chocks and set sails on them.

The two were abreast off the Lizard at 8 A.M.; off Start Point by noon; off Portland at 6 P.M.; at midnight off Beachy Head still abreast, and burning blue lights, and jockeying each other for first pilot off Dungeness at 4 A.M. At Deal the *Taeping* picked up the best tug and tied up in the London Docks twenty minutes ahead of the *Ariel*.

The *Serica*, which had been foaming up the French Coast unbeknown to the others, docked on the same tide, and the *Fiery Cross* twenty-four hours later—having raced three-quarters round the world.

The tea-clippers come no more up-channel, shearing the blue ridges with sharp cut-waters, their brass-work a-sparkle, trembling under their press of cloudy canvas, the spray dripping from their passeree booms; steam and the Suez Canal rang their knell. But whenever men speak of beauty their names will be fervently mentioned—*Surprise* and *Flying Cloud*, *Swordfish*, *Ariel*, *Hallowe'en* and *Thermophylæ*, the white sea wonders.

That night after the last yawning occupant of the smoking-room had betaken himself bedwards I went out on deck alone. The full moon was aloft, infusing the still night with a wan, misty radiance. On the star-board beam the China coast was faintly visible, a mere thickening of the horizon. A light flashed intermittently, Haimum, I reckoned—or else Lammock Isle. Should I see anything? If men come back as ghosts to visit the scenes of past triumphs why not a ship?—that most living and sensitive fabric of man's hands. These were the waters they had trod so proudly—why not? Should I see? Some spectre clipper creeping in-

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

shore to woo the land breeze, quiet as a moth, the eerie sea-fire licking at her forefoot, her canvas glimmering pale under the moon. Should I see her? Should I? I saw nothing—only the moon, the pearl-grey mist and the far light flashing, Lammock—or Haimum.



CHAPTER VI

HONGKONG

In the old days the many islands that stand about the mouth of the Canton River were known to navigators as the *Ladrones* from the pirates they harboured, *Ladrão* being the Portuguese for thief. On sighting the Ass's Ears ships running in for the Chu-kiang, the Pearl River, used to get ready to fight their way through; cutlasses were served out, guns loaded, boarding nettings triced up—and very seldom were these precautions unnecessary. There is a record of an American opium-clipper sailing into Macao with a dead pirate dangling at each yard-arm, "*pour encourager les autres.*"

A master industrialist named Chang Po established himself on what is now Hongkong and played such havoc with the coastwise shipping that the Viceroy of Canton, thinking such genius for thieving wasted outside government service, made a mandarin of him—following the precedence of the English who made the buccaneer Morgan governor of Jamaica. After numerous unpleasantnesses culminating in the ambitious attempt of the baker to poison every mother's son in one morning, and only failing through overdoing the arsenic, the English community in Canton thought it wise to remove, and the old base of Chang Po was settled on. The final treaty with the Chinese was signed in 1843, after the Opium War, and the island became officially a Crown Colony; Kowloon being added after the war of 1860.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



The Canton refugee fleet cast anchor at a pirate haunt on the south side of the island, now known as Aberdeen, then as Heun Kong—or Port of Fragrance. Outgoing Indiamen had long frequented it to fill water-barrels, the springs being particularly pure. The Chinese for “stream” and “port” sounding the same



Emancipation.

to wind-beaten maritime ears, the seamen translated one for the other and misnamed the whole island “Fragrant Streams,” and as such it has remained to this day.

A contemporary scribe, railing against the choice of Hongkong in preference to Chusan, calls it “wretched



and, pestiferous . . . an unproductive, mountainous, lumpish isle. . . . The mortality of our troops has been as one in three and a half." Says another, "The islanders themselves are a roving set of beings, floating on the wide face of the waters with their families, and committing depredation whenever it can be done with impunity."

Though the second half of these charges remains good to-day, the first must be withdrawn. The wretched, pestiferous, lumpish isle is now prosperous, healthy, and one of the sights of the world. The municipal authorities of Victoria have thought nothing of moving a mountain if it got in the way. They built their city by shoveling a large portion of one into the sea, ironing it out and selling it off in business sites. Over in Kowloon they are up to the same tricks. Says the Pilot Book, giving warning as to bearings, "Extensive reclamation works are occurring, in the course of which some of the smaller hills may be removed." Time was when a mountain could consider itself reasonably safe, but now it is liable to wake up any morning and find itself a billiard-table. Having flattened out a large portion of their mountain, the Hongkongese swarmed up the face of the remainder and, with the dizzy proclivities of nesting cormorants, built princely private houses on the slopes and ledges—up, up to nearly two thousand feet above sea-level. After dark, looking across from the mainland the black loom of the Peak merges with the black overhanging night and it is difficult to decide where the lights leave off and the stars begin.

As to Hongkong's prosperity, its docks can accommodate ships of twenty thousand tons; its yearly tonnage, entered and cleared, approaches fifty million; its annual trade exceeds one hundred million sterling;



its population numbers six hundred thousand. Thus the arid Thieves' Island of 1843! Its narrow streets hum with life, are lined by dark shops whence mysterious odours issue, and overhung with lanterns and colourful signs, some (to me) illegible, others not—such as Hop Sing & Co., Mustard & Co., Wo-Fat, Hang-On and Ahmen. I failed to discover the last-named gentleman's profession, but let us hope he is an undertaker.

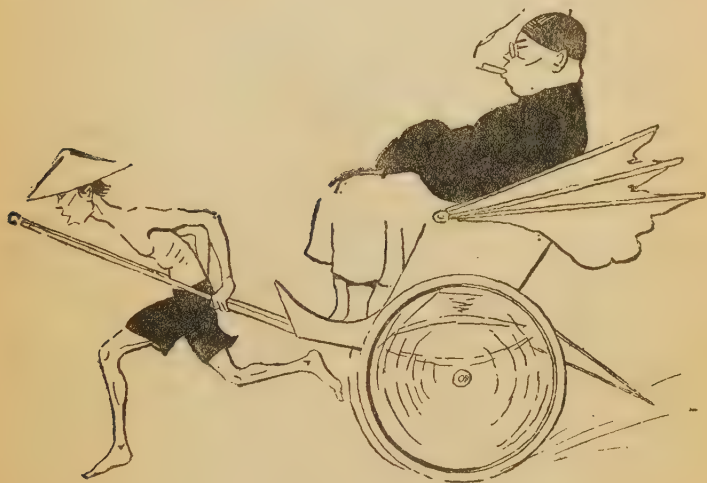


The Skin-Hawker.

The walks up the hillside among the high-perched houses of the *taipans* are most pleasant with their flowery shrubs and handsome trees, and there of a morning you may come upon house-boys taking their Chinese masters' pet birds out to sniff the air and meet the other birds; or, perchance, hear a frenzied uproar and see a fur-hawker toiling along Tregunter Path surrounded by every yelping hound, dog, cur and pup in the colony, who have recognised the pelts of departed cats masquerading under more fashionable names.

But it is the sweeping Praya, the waterfront, that is

most fascinating. At the jetties lie the little white steamers that run to Macao and Canton. Besides them swim laden country boats and lighters, also sampans jostling each other like a flock of geese. Half-naked coolies go grunting by with their peculiar wriggling trot, phlegmatic pigs slung on their carrying-poles, crates of fowls and ducks. Hand-carts creak past,



On the Praya.

stacked with bales and boxes, men, women and children pushing behind, straining on ropes in front, strung out fan-wise, like Siberian sleigh-dogs. Rickshaws pass, the coolies shouting their warning cries, their varnished blue hats jauntily a-cock. Black-clad sampan women clamour shrilly for hire.

Out beyond the jetties lie the dingy coasting steamers, their names inscribed in large Chinese characters on their stained top-sides. Two destroyers,



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



a cruiser and a lopsided aëroplane-carrier lie off Kellett Island; and over towards the Kowloon shore are the big blue-water freighters and the liners, the black funnels of the P. & O. and Messageries Maritimes, the yellow of the C. P. R. Empresses, the blue of Holt's, the price-marked black-and-red of the Dollar.

The fifteen square miles of harbour are in constant agitation, steamers coming and steamers going, to Singapore and Europe, to Batavia and Saigon, to Shanghai and Yokohama, to Manila, Brisbane, and Auckland. Square-cut lighters wobble along under tatters of sail and unwieldy sweeps. Sampans scud from ship to ship steered by their capable proprietresses. Tugs snort out through Sulphur Channel to drag a cripple in. Launches, coughing like asthmatics, buzz hither and thither upon their hasty affairs, harbour launches, chandlers' launches, police launches, tenders and pleasure craft—the whole scene backed by the skeleton-ribbed wall of the Nine Dragons mountains. And always the junks, the immemorial, everlasting junks, dropping in and out of harbour about their lawful (or unlawful) occasions, high-pooped, mat-sailed, with round, imperturbable eyes, winging unruffled, unhurried, between the latest multi-decked steam Ritz of the P. & O. and the steel-grey carrier whereon the droning aëroplanes alight like great bees on a mammoth hive. The same junk upon which Marco Polo cast the first recording European eyes, the same junk that will be floating unruffled, unhurried, at the end of the world.

The best comprehensive view of Hongkong harbour is to be had from the Peak, and the easiest way up is by the cable tramway, which at certain points achieves a grade of one in two and gives one the curious impression that the houses are leaning hard against the slope as though to save themselves from toppling



face forwards on to the city roofs below. Majestic as is the view by day, by night it is breath-snatching. On three separate occasions I tried to reach the Peak at night, but each time something turned up and I turned after it. On the fourth I gave out that I had a long-standing engagement with a mythical artilleryman over in Kowloon, dined alone in my hotel (which was the last place where any one would have dreamed of looking for me) and set out afoot for the tramway station. As I passed Murray Barracks I heard a loud outburst of cheering from the yard behind.

"What's on?" I inquired of a passer-by.

"Boxing," said he. "The battalion against the Navy."

I turned aside again.

A spirited display it was, and in a picturesque setting. The ring was in the open, lit by arc-lamps hung from trees. At the ring-side sat the officers, naval in blue and gold, military in their scarlet mess-jackets. Behind them was row upon row of the healthy-faced Tommies and bluejackets. The yard is well below the level of the road, so that we outsiders, lolling over the palings, had an excellent bird's-eye view.

Said the officiating sergeant-major in tones that could be heard in Peking:

"On me right Stoker 'obbs; *H.M.S. Anonymous*, heleven stone, height. On me left Bandsman 'arrigan, Blankshire Regiment, heleven stone. Time!"

The last word had barely left his mouth before Bandsman Harrigan had welted Stoker Hobbs under the jaw and Stoker Hobbs reciprocated by walloping Bandsman Harrigan heartily in the brisket.

"I will lay five to four in dollars that Stoker puts it across the big drum in four rounds," said a stranger in evening dress, lolling over the rail beside me.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



"Make it six to four," said I. "The musician's giving eight pounds. Be reasonable!"

"Done!" said he.

At that moment Stoker Hobbs did something with both hands which seemed to have an hypnotic effect on Bandsman Harrigan, for he fell on the back of his head and remained there, indifferent to Past, Present or Future. They had hardly removed the corpse before the sergeant-major was introducing Petty-Officer Hamblyn and Lance-Corporal Macfarlane in tones audible in Java, Sumatra and the adjacent isles; and I had hardly paid up the first bet before Petty-Officer Hamblyn was being removed feet foremost and I had to be paying up on a second. The affair continued on the same fast and furious lines; the supply of cheerful warriors who came up grinning, prepared to knock or be knocked unconscious, appeared inexhaustible. They chopped and wiped and banged and ripped away at each other from the first sound of the gong till one or the other went backwards over the ropes on to the officers' shirt-fronts. Ribs rattled, jaws clicked, eyes bulged, blood was cheap, good humour cheaper; but of that fine science prevalent in London professional circles whereby two adepts by smart footwork can elude each other altogether, or by resolute clinching slumber the evening out on each other's bosoms, there was nothing to be seen.

The stranger continued to propose bets, I to pay them. On the other side of us Chinamen hung over the railings mildly wondering where the "sport" lay in getting one's nose knocked up under one's ear.

"By Gosh!" said the stranger suddenly. "By Gosh! I've got an appointment—clean forgotten!"

"By Gosh!" I said. "Now you remind me, so have I."



"Good-night!" he cried.

"Hold hard," said I, feeling in my pockets. "My appointment's with the Peak. Lend me my tram-fare, will you?"

He complied, otherwise I might have missed it for a fourth time. I disembarked at Victoria Gap and wandered along that overhanging ledge, Lugard Road. It was empty, save for a soldier from Mount Austin Sanatorium convalescing agreeably in the arms of a lady's maid.

Thirteen hundred feet below lay Victoria, hazy with lights. The roof of the theatre was picked out in electric bulbs, the ornate Chinese restaurants on Queens' Road and West Point were crowned with blazing coronets. New Kowloon, over the water, twinkled brightly. Old Kowloon City, further to the east, showed but a glimmer. The cruiser was giving a dance and was outlined with lamps—she looked like a piece of jewelry pinned on black silk, a diamond ship, tiny and sparkling. An Admiral Orient liner and a Toyo Kisen maru lay off Stonecutters Island, their tiers of portholes pricking the dark in rows of golden pin-points. Off Sei Ying Poon shone the coasters' riding lights with the sampan lanterns clustering under the flank of the Praya like a swarm of glowworms. The lights of the sleepless, hastening launches wove firefly patterns across the dark bosom of the harbour. Up there on the mountain-top, alone with the stars and whispering night winds one felt like a high god, remote and solitary, brooding over a toy and tinsel world.

In November, according to Chinese superstition, the dead revisit the earth, lapping up the offertories laid out by pious descendants. I wonder if that ruffian Chang Po returns to squat in his old eyrie on the Peak? The view must afford him considerable surprise.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



BALLAD OF EQUANIMITY

Up from Malacca, through mysterious seas,
Seeking new marts and silks and spices rare,
Came those stout seamen, eke the Portuguese,
With roll of drum and lordly trumpet blare.
Their sakers crashed and proudly flourished their
Emblazoned banners on the taffrails high.
Their gilding sparkled in the noonday glare . . .
The junk observed with an unblinking eye.

Rolling the foam beneath her oaken knees,
Came the great Indiaman, her yard-arms square,
Her brass-bound captain pacing at his ease,
Her guns a-sowl—"Competitors, beware!"
And after her that fairest of the fair,
Clean-run, stag-gallant, with white wings to fly,
The sky-sail clipper—"Pekoe, London, Care" . . .
The junk observed with an unblinking eye.

The queen of sail went flashing down the breeze,
Followed the steamer, her prosaic heir,
Paddle and screw-boats in enlarged degrees,
Masses of steel whence murderous cannon stare,
Floating hotels where sits the millionaire
'Midst bands and palms and quaffs his Cliquot (dry).
Grey tubes that plunge and to the depths repair . . .
The junk observed with an unblinking eye.

ENVOY

Prince of the Future, come you in the air
Or craft that seas and underseas defy,
Come when you will, the junk will still be there
And watch your passing with unblinking eye.

CHAPTER VII

MACAO

I went to Macao on a neat, flat-bottomed little steamer, divided not into water-tight but bomb-proof compartments. The engines were fenced off with substantial steel grilles. The second-class deck was shut off from the first by a padlocked steel door, and the navigating officers shut away in a bullet-proof wheel-house and further protected by armed Sikh guards. The trip was as uneventful as a launch ride from Richmond to Hampton Court; but it is not always so; the Ladrone Islands remain faithful to their name. Not once or twice have the Macao boats been cut off, their officers shot and every foreign passenger butchered. There is a little steamer running to this day that has been twice taken; on the second occasion two hundred people perished and she herself was burnt down to the water-line.

For three hours we dodged in and out between islands and fishing-junks and at length Macao came into view: Fort Guia, with its lighthouse—the first in China Seas—the black walls of Fort Monte up on the hill, the bishop's palace, the brightly painted houses of the wealthy along the Praia. Round Fort de Barra we swung and into the Porto Interior, past packed masses of junks, all armed to the teeth. The co-operative guard-junk carried no less than seven guns, two a-side on her main deck, two on her poop and another forward. The decks were museums of ancient cannon. There were guns mounted for action that must have



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



come East with the first European vessel. Sakers, falcons, falconets and patereroes embossed with Portuguese and Spanish royal arms. Dutch and English swivel-guns, and stock-fowlers with arched dolphins for handles; wornout signal-guns; Chinese guns, dragon-mouthed—any old thing that would throw a charge. Most of them looked rusted through and horribly insecure on their mountings. I presumed that they were only for show, that nobody would have the temerity to fire them, but I was assured by a resident that did a pirate show up the aged pieces came merrily into play. A junk lost meant starvation for several families, so the fisher people fought to the bitter end, risking a blow-out at the breach; women ramming and sponging, toddling brats acting as powder-monkeys. The favourite charge was a bottle or two, and I can imagine it would be most effective. Half a dozen old smooth-bores vomiting mouthfuls of splintered glass at short range should be enough to discourage the most enthusiastic pirate.

The name Macao is derived from A-ma-ngao—the “Harbour of the Goddess A-ma.” The pious Portuguese official title is “Cidade do Santo Nome de Dios de Macau.”

In 1516 Albuquerque, the great Captain General of the Indies, dispatched one Perestrello from Malacca. He reached the mouth of the Chu-kiang, but did not penetrate the Ladrones. He was followed a year later by eight ships under Perez de Andrade, who went through to Canton. Choosing a strategic trading-site, the Portuguese insinuated themselves into Macao as the camel of the fable squirmed its way into the Arabians’ tent, by imperceptible advances. They first got leave to erect a few drying-sheds on the beach, the sheds swelled into warehouses, the warehouses into a



fort. In 1557, the Chinese, finding the foreigners had come to stay, built a barricade across the narrow neck which connects the tiny peninsula to Hiang-chan, with the idea of isolating the plague spot. The Chinese continued to hold nominal territorial rights over the place and collect an annual rental of £71 until as late as 1849, when, after the murder of the governor, Amaral, while out riding, and a general uprising of natives, the mandarins were kicked out and Macao became fully independent. For three hundred years it was the only permanent European stronghold on the China coast, the only place where ships disabled by battle, reefs, or typhoons could crawl to refit, or cast-away crews take refuge. Here, no less than four times, came the covetous Dutch, fresh from their successes at Malacca and the Straits—and were four times rudely repulsed.

It is to Macao that Anson came, haling with him his opulent prize, the great plate galleon *Nuestra Señora de Cobadonga*. Here came the *Discovery* and *Resolution* after the death of Captain Cook, saluting the fort with eleven guns. Here, after the marriage of Charles II to the Portuguese Infanta, came the John Company frigates and, later, American traders, led by the Salem *Grand Turk*, the first ship to fly the stars and bars in China seas. Here came the smart little opium-clippers, British and American, running the gauntlet of swarming pirates and mandarin boats. From here sailed the dreadful coolie ships and the first tea-clippers. This is the cradle of Far Eastern trade. Macao's three centuries of remunerative isolation ended with the settlement of Hongkong. Never scrupulous, from thence on she was to live by any means that presented itself, no matter how disreputable, as an asylum for criminals, a thieves' mart, by smug-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



gling, opium, the coolie traffic, gambling hells and official lotteries. The coolie trade was put a stop to in 1874, but the other activities continue as merrily as ever. It battens on vice, mentionable and unmentionable, and is, in short, a little hell on earth.

There was a book of short stories published lately which had a great vogue in England and the States. The author wrote with an air of intimate knowledge of the world's shady holes and ends. One of the stories concerned Macao. There was a wealthy Englishman in it, a gambling-dive, a naughty Portuguese, a half-caste singsong girl, knives, murder—in fact, as much fireworks as a chap could crowd into three thousand words without setting the paper alight. This story in mind, combined with some foreknowledge of Macao, its history, industries and ideals, I landed in the place with the highest expectations. "Here," said I, "we shall assuredly see some fun."

I saw as much fun—that is, of the sort I expected—as is evident in a Bedfordshire village on a wet Sunday afternoon in Lent. I went into the gambling-dives, and so far from being robbed, made money. I went into a dark foul little den and bought a gilded idol (stolen, of course) dirt cheap. I hung about dark alleys waiting to see somebody sand-bagged. I had but one encounter. An unwashed half-caste person, who had been watching my peregrinations, accosted me and asked me if I had lost myself? If so, might he show me home? Seeing through his offer, I said he might. But instead of steering me into some noisome dive he faithfully landed me on my doorstep. Very disappointing! I did all I could, but short of batting a policeman under the eye, or setting fire to the bishop, I saw no way of getting myself into trouble. One of my most vivid recollections of Macao is a parade of charm-



ing little girls in white, coming demurely out of Sunday School, shepherded by a benign old coloured gentleman in a bowler hat and frock-coat; dear little creatures with large mobile black eyes and the most winning smiles. One fancied the little angels would take wings all of a sudden and go fluttering round one's head, twittering like birds and scattering roses. An idyllic scene for a hell on earth!

For Macao is a hell on earth, let there be no mistake about it. It is a place that thrives on the financial, physical and moral ruin of thousands, luring the feeble-minded to such excesses that in the end they sell their children into slavery or commit suicide, but had I thought about it I should have expected nothing but



We shall find Hades itself admirably conducted.

what I did find, perfect peace—on the surface. To make a resort of that kind succeed it must be made as attractive as possible, and people are not attracted to a place where they get systematically knocked on the head. I feel sure that, when we get there, we shall find Hades itself admirably conducted—on the outside—but it'll be Hell for all that.

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

The Chinese gambling-house proprietors pay the Portuguese millions of dollars yearly for their privileges and in return demand absolute security for their clients. They want all the money that comes into Macao to pass through their hands and not be side-tracked into the pockets of thugs and thieves. I am told that, besides the efficient police force, they maintain a secret service of their own. A ruffian flying from mainland justice may abide on the peninsula and no questions asked, but woe betide him if he try any of his tricks on the community.

A resident told me that his sister-in-law came home from a dance to find that her house had been burgled and her very valuable jewels stolen. She notified the police and went to bed. Next morning when her house-boy brought in the coffee he mentioned casually that there was a Chinaman in the kitchen with the *senhora's* jewels. He had been sitting there for some hours, not wishing to disturb the *senhora*. He returned the jewels with no more comment than a grunt and went quietly away. How he caught the burglar and what he did to him was not mentioned. There was no court-case, nothing more said—but probably the gulls saw something, a cord drawn tight about its throat, floating seawards through the Ladrones.

The gambling-houses are mainly situated in the Street of Happiness and are dingy affairs with no pretensions towards decoration except a cheap print or two and notices requesting you to spit in non-existent spittoons. Fan-tan is played, the machinery of which is very simple. All that is required is a flat plate about eighteen inches square, a handful of cash, a porcelain bowl and a single chopstick. The four corners of the plate are numbered and on these numbers, or their combinations, bets are made. The money having been laid



on the table opposite the chosen numbers on the plate, a croupier pops the bowl haphazard over the pile of cash, draws the bowl to him and counts out the cash beneath it, picking them out with the chopsticks and placing them in lots of four. The number left over wins, the house taking ten per cent of all transactions.

The table is on the ground floor and a certain number of gamblers can be accommodated about it, but others ascend to the first and second stories and get a bird's-eye view of the table down a well cut through the two floors, so that looking upward you see two circles of faces peering down upon you. Bets are taken up above by attendants who convey the money to and from the table in little baskets swinging on the ends of strings.

At a gambling-house every comfort is provided, according to celestial taste. There is no reason why one should ever leave it, as long as the money lasts. The table is open for play day and night, meals are provided for the hungry, opium for the depressed, beds for the weary, singsong damsels for the—let us say—musically inclined. All on the premises.

I was in a gambling-house one evening when there were several excursion boats in from Canton and things were humming in the "City of the Sacred Name of God." The little baskets went flying from floor to floor like financial carrier-pigeons, stuffed with coin and notes. The gamesters were mainly Chinese, but my immediate neighbours were a Hindu, a Danish merchant captain, and two little Japanese *filles de joie*. At the back of the room, oblivious to all else, three opium smokers lay stretched on couches. One, an emaciated European degenerate, lay with his thin knees drawn almost up to his chin, his wide brown eyes glowing blankly into immeasurable distances. He looked like



a man who had died leaving in his eyes the first far vision of some unholy paradise. Down below, shorn of head, cigarette-ends trailing from the corners of their mouths, yellow bodies stripped to the waist, stood the croupiers, in strong sartorial contrast to their shirt-fronted Monte Carlo *confrères*—but every bit as efficient, dealing smoothly, swiftly, almost listlessly, with five different currencies and fifty separate transactions at once. To me, with whom any calculation above ten involves the removal of my boots and the calling of my toes to the aid of my fingers, the spectacle appeared little short of miraculous.

The Chinaman is a born gambler, and a good one. Win or lose, there is no sign. Coolies entered, dripping from their labours, risked their pitiable earnings and saw them vanish without a murmur. Rich merchants—having made innumerable calculations, consulted oracles, etc.—staked several thousand dollars at a plunge, and watched them disappear without the twitch of a lip. So it went on, hour after hour, the crowd changing, the little baskets bobbing up and down, the naked croupiers sucking their cigarette-stubs, listlessly handling five different currencies. Men hawked and spat, smoke hung about the lamps, the place stank with the reek of crowded yellow humanity. And all the time, amid the comings and goings, the outcast at the back of the room lay still as death, knees drawn up as in some last rigour, fixed eyes smitten with ungodly visions.

In contemporary Macao any existing activity is provided by the Chinese. The fearless Argonauts of Don John Emmanuel have given place to a mongrel breed who appear to sleep all day behind their green shutters, issuing only to walk the Praia Grande in the cool of the evening. The town is a bit of medieval Portugal



transported half the world away. People old Coimbra with Chinese and there you have it. The arcaded houses have flat, brown-tiled roofs and are painted all colours, cream, yellow, pink, blue and mauve. The narrow, cobbled alleys twist this way and that, up hill and down, past here a convent, there a grim wall, blank but for a single-barred air-hole, black as the pit inside. It is a relic of the yellow slave traffic, a barracoön where the coolies were kept, awaiting shipment to the Chincha Isles, there to toil in misery till they died, shovelling guano for the Peruvian Government.

The whole place is a relic of old barbarism, the shell of former power. The fine old houses where the gentlemen adventurers of all nations hung their breast-plates up and "gloried and drank deep," now harbour Goa Hindus and coolies, a family to each room. The flag of the country that bred Prince Henry the Navigator, Vasco da Gama and Magellan, still waves proudly over the Governor's residence—but His Excellency draws his pay envelope from the gambling-house owners. At the top of an imposing flight of steps, like a huge cardboard silhouette reared against the sky, stands a curious monument, the Church of San Paulo. But there is no church; it was burnt down nearly a century ago; only the façade remains, with its gaping doors and curious carving of the Virgin treading on the heathen dragon, medieval ships and winged skeletons. It typifies Macao of to-day—a façade only.

The greatest name associated with the place is Luis Vaz de Camoens, aristocrat, stout soldier and national poet of Portugal. For rash love affairs and rasher duels he was exiled to Ceuta, leaving Lisbon with the boast that though he had seen all his enemies' heels they had never seen his. He lost an eye fighting the



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



Moors and returned to the Tagus with the honours of war, only to be up to his old tricks again, roistering round the streets at night, rapier out, and poaching in his superiors' preserves. That is always dangerous. I had a friend once, an officer of French hussars. I lost sight of him, but met him again in Fez, Morocco, serving with the Chasseurs d'Afrique.

"Hello," said I. "What are you doing here? What have you been up to?"

"I touched on my Colonel's honour," said he.

"Wife?" I asked.



Rash love affairs and rasher duels.

"Bon Dieu, non! Je m'en fiche de ça! Sa maîtresse."

Camoens paid the same penalty. It was India this time and on Palm Sunday, 1553, he said good-bye to Catherina de Ataide, the "Natherica" of his swelling love songs, and sailed for the East. From Goa he



was sent pirate-hunting up the Red Sea, thence to the Moluccas and Macao. He served a year or so in the Macanese garrison, was returned to Goa under arrest, later to Lisbon, where he arrived, broken with wounds and fever, to find the beloved Catherina dead. He died in 1580, in extreme poverty, "having triumphed in the East and sailed five thousand leagues by sea." A gallant, tempestuous man with a ready blade and a singing heart, type of his country's golden age. In a little garden overlooking the harbour there is a grotto where, escaping the riot of the barrack-room, he is said to have sat and worked away at his epic, the undying "Lusiads." What the Portuguese neglected in life they honour in death and the garden is well tended, the grotto regarded in the nature of a shrine. Which is as it should be, for in that maimed, unruly swordsman it harboured immortality.

There is another garden in Macao which is not tended at all. Decaying walls enclose it, grass and weeds grow high. It is the old Protestant Cemetery, and its crumbling tombstones recount the cost at which early Eastern trade was driven. "Sacred to the memory of Julius Doyle, midshipman of the ship *Windsor Castle*, youngest son of Frederick Doyle, Esq., of Bluehills, Longford, Ireland. Died of wounds, Macao Roads. Aged 17." "Nathaniel Doggett of the brig *Republic*, of Boston, Mass. Died of fever, Macao Roads. Aged 19. Erected by his sorrowing shipmates." And so it goes, tombstone after tombstone. The astonishing thing is the youth of these people. Hardly one of them is over twenty, youngsters all, boys who set out on the great adventure, "to shake the pagoda tree"—and found the fruit thereof exceedingly bitter. In the bare, deserted, little chapel is the nicest memorial of all. It commemorates an early



pastor, and after recounting his manifold qualities, adds, as a sort of postscript, "Addicted to hospitality."

CAMOENS

(1580. *Dying in a Common Plague Hospital in Lisbon,
"Without Sheet to Cover Him"*)

"Water! A drink! Will no one answer? Who
Are ye like shadows through the shadows slinking?
Ghosts are ye? Welcome, ghosts! The old dog's sinking.
How fares it with you, friend?—and you and you
In your exalted sphere? Shines Heaven as blue
As over golden Goa? Is the drinking
As deep as at Macao?—or the clinking
Of torchlit steel as merry as we knew?

Of wars and wanderings this is the sum,
No mistress keeps my side, no fond lips cling.
The April lad now desolate December.
Lisbon forgets me now—but time will come . . .
Out beyond death she'll hear a soldier sing
Of vanished pomp, and, in her tears, remember."

CHAPTER VIII

COASTWISE

One morning, in the full blast of the northeast monsoon, I boarded a steamer with the purpose of getting to Haiphong in Tonking, via Hoi-how and Pakhoi. The steamer, whose Chinese name signified "Exceeding Brightness," was so exceeding old that when they swabbed decks the water came through the seams and gave me a shower-bath. That is the sole complaint I have against her. She got me to my destination eventually, fed me well and had as pleasant a set of officers as I have met. She lay off West Point. A police launch hung astern, her personnel aboard us, searching for possible pirates, rummaging the deck passengers for arms. Our first-class deck was fenced off from the others by bars like a tiger cage, sharpened at the top and wreathed with coils of barbed-wire. A Sikh stood at either bullet-proof door, armed with rifle and revolver. Sampans clustered about the ladder. Cargo winches rattled and hissed. Lighters slogged and chaffed alongside. The lightermen, sending up bales of cargo, bawled their loudest. Yellow chow-dogs barked their sharpest. Ladies, with that year's crop of babies slung on their backs, shoved on boat-hooks and shrieked their shrillest. Last year's crop, tethered with bits of string, tottered about the jerking decks—it was marvellous to see the little beggars balance. Everything was tethered with bits of string—brats, cats, dogs, fowls and ducks.

At length the last bale was got aboard, the lighters



were cast off, the sampans hoisted their sails and the launch went flying up-harbour to search another vessel. It was as though our ship, like a large dog weary of parasites, had given itself a shake.

The moorings went overboard, the syren snarled, we were away. Dirty feather-beds of cloud, sagging and rolling, hid the green peaks of Hongkong. Cold rain fell in driven gusts, whirling across the harbour. Out through Sulphur Channel we went. The Irish harbour master of Hoi-how, returning to duty, told me that after the typhoon of 1906 they had to plough their way out through a thick scum of bodies, churning them up with the screw. Over two thousand native craft were lost, with ten thousand people. Nowadays they get word of typhoons, beforehand, by wireless, and herd the sampans into prepared shelters. He added that he thought we should have dirty weather.

We did. There was a party of Hakka pedlars camped out on the fore-deck with their wares, bunches of varnished wooden clogs, joss-sticks and firecrackers. They sat on mats, eating rice and strips of meat out of little bowls, and spat and spat. A sea dolloped over the port rail and washed them into the scuppers. They removed to starboard and spat some more. Over came another sea, with the same result. They retired down No. 1 hatch, bag and baggage, clacking like hens, their crackers feeling considerably less fiery, I should imagine.

The harbour master, two officers and myself tiffined together, other passengers being audible but not visible. All that afternoon we reeled along under a driving black sky, pitching both ends out. Dinner saw the same quartet at table and afterwards we played euchre to the accompaniment of groaning beams and clicking pantryware. By noon next day the double-peaked



black hill that marks northeast Hainan came in sight, between rain squalls. Hainan Island, where in 1540 came Mendez Pinto (like Marco Polo, by no means the liar his ignorant contemporaries declared) with his free-booting countrymen, to find a vast fleet engaged in the "fishing of pearles for the treasure-house of the Son of the Sun." Finding the fishery protected by "forty great junks and twenty-five Vancans with oars," the Portuguese thought best to pose as peaceable Siamese traders—for the moment—and passed on to desecrate the royal tombs at Ningpo, having first, as good Christians, provided themselves with some friars to act as chaplains and bless their efforts. They have a certain pawky humour, all their own, the Portuguese.

There was nothing to suggest pearls in my first sight of Hainan. A low desolate coast of sand-dunes and stunted scrub, without tree or habitation. Hainan Head poked its long snout into a turmoil of waters. To the north as far as the eye could see—and further—were breakers, breakers, piling up on the great South Banks in hills of yellow foam. We were to pass between the Banks and Hainan Head. There seemed no room. Looking forward through the rain and flying spindrift, the breakers on the Banks and those on Hainan Head appeared continuous.

The young captain, dressed in oilskins, came out of his cabin humming a tune from "Iolanthe" and climbed to the bridge.

Said the harbour master, peering through the murk, "Can't see the buoys yet. There are three in the Channel, two black and a red. They drag infernally, though."

"Who sees to 'em?" I asked. "The Chinese?"

He snorted. "God save us, no! I do. The Chinese—! D'you know the Paracels?"



"Big nest of reefs down south?"

"Yes—devil of a patch. The Chinese government annexed 'em in 1909 and thought they'd build a lighthouse. So they sent out a party of workmen—and then forgot all about them. When they remembered and sent out a relief party they found the poor devils' bones whitening on the reef. Then they forgot the second party."

"If they go on long enough they'll be able to build the lighthouse of bones," said I. "How does the tide run hereabouts?"

"Three to four knots with this gale. When we get through we'll hit a four-knot cross-tide, bang!—like a wall. Beastly place! However, it's well marked at the moment. There's a British steamer sunk on the Banks and a Jap and a junk off the Head. Their masts are still showing, or were last week. About feeding time, isn't it?"

As we went in to tiffin the old boat gave a shudder and a hop as though some one had hit her on the nose and rolled over first on one side and then on the other. A chime of crashing crockery in the pantry announced that we had met the cross-seas and were through the South Channel. The captain came down to table still humming.

Had I ever met Joseph Conrad? he asked. I said I had, years ago. We spent an afternoon together, unravelling a set of harness Percival Gibbon (also an ex-sailor) had ingeniously assembled. The captain admired his books. A good chap, wasn't he? No long-haired affectations about him, eh? Remained a good deal of the seaman always, under the ink, eh? I said I had an idea he was prouder of having been mate of the wool-clipper *Loch Etive* than of having written



"Lord Jim." The captain, drinking Bass' Pale Ale, nodded his satisfaction.

That afternoon we crept into Hoi-How Bay in a pea-soup fog, leadsman in the chains, syren blaring. Invisible ships blared sullenly back. The leadsman was a Chinese quartermaster, a wizened old yellow ape in a blue blouse, red cummerbund and steel spectacles. As the lead found bottom he threw his head back and loosed a long and melancholy howl, for all the world like a love-sick coyote on a moonlight night. "Hi yah oo-oo-oo-o!"

I asked the mate how on earth he managed to understand what it meant. He replied that he didn't; it was pure eyewash anyhow. The old chap was too blind to read the soundings and too proud to relinquish his post and just howled to "save face" with his subordinates, who, not understanding, imagined he was howling in the purest English. The chains were close under the bridge and by leaning over he, the mate, could read the marks himself. There was no harm done and it kept the old monkey happy.

No boats came off and all night we rolled in Hoi-How Roads, amid fog, darkness and moaning syrens. The other passengers turned up for dinner, a pretty English girl, two agreeable medical missionaries bound for Haiphong, and a Chinese official in sky-blue silk booked to Pakhoi. Another day and still we rolled fog-bound, but towards evening a big, smart, sailing sampan blundered into us out of the murk and a Cockney boarding officer came up the ladder. There was a consultation in the captain's cabin and afterwards the harbour master came to say good-bye; he was off ashore, he said. I noticed the Chinese official was behind him, bag in hand.

"I thought that fellow was going to Pakhoi," said I.

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

The harbour master chuckled. "He's changed his mind. The Peking Government had a gunboat in these waters and a week or so ago they made the mistake of paying the commander his wages in full, instead of keeping him a year or two in arrears, as is usual. Whereupon he put into Pakhoi and sold the boat, lock, stock and barrel, and decamped with the proceeds. Peking sent this chap to see if he could buy their own property back. But my boarding officer says Pakhoi fell to the Cantonese rebels yesterday, so he's not going there after all—and neither are you. It looks as though the monsoon will be coming on again. I'm afraid you'll have a rough time out here, and the Lord knows when you'll get any lighters—still, a Merry Christmas!"

He dropped into the sampan, a parcel of toys under one arm, a Christmas-tree under the other. "I did wish you a Merry Christmas, didn't I?" he called.

"Yes, Little Sunshine, you did," said the mate gloomily. "And in return we wish you the bellyache."

CHAPTER IX

COASTWISE (*Continued*)

By dawn next day the sea had gone down and the fog rolled off. Hainan was at last visible, a low shore with trees growing apparently in the surf, and junks sailing seemingly on land, but actually on lagoons. To the southeast sand-dunes, a few white buildings and a tall pagoda. We flew a signal for lighters all day, and so did the four other steamers in the roads, but no lighters came, only a few fishing-junks with yellow-ochre sails, drifting westward with the tide.

The English girl walked our caged deck with the captain; she seemed in distress, so did he. Later he came and walked with me, his brow troubled. "Deuced awkward!" he muttered. "Feel a brute—can't help it, though."

"Can't help what?" I asked.

"It's Miss B. She's engaged to a chap in Haiphong, hasn't seen him for two years. She naturally wants to spend Christmas with him, and furthermore has got all the seasonable 'eats' for the British and American community—plum-puddings and so on. And now I'm darned if I know when we'll arrive. I've got a couple of hundred tons of cargo to get off and that boarding officer says the lightermen are debating whether or not to follow Pakhoi's example and call a boycott. So, in the meanwhile I've got to lie here waiting for 'em to make up their silly minds. Ginger'll be raving."

"Ginger being the beloved, I suppose."

"Yes, decent bloke, young Ginger. I play golf with him. I'm deuced sorry, but what can I do?"

Next morning and still no lighters. I tried to be cheerful to Miss B—they *might* come that afternoon.

She shook her blonde head. Not they! The monsoon would be blowing and it would be too rough. Or else it would be calm and not wind enough. Or if wind and sea behaved themselves the tide would be wrong. Or there'd be a strike—or something. Malignant Fate was combining against her and Ginger. By now both he and her parents in Hongkong would be sure she was drowned, starting off in that awful gale, and there was no means of informing them to the contrary. Two households in mourning. Haiphong puddingless, desolate! Merry Christmas—huh! Merry Christmas stuck out here with a bunch of missionaries and a crowd of men who sat up all night chanting, "Make it spades!" or "I'll go alone!" and didn't care whether it was Christmas day or Easter Monday. Merry Christmas!"—her lip quivered.

The boarding officer came off in the forenoon and was treated to whisky and "Iolanthe" by the captain, who accompanied him to the gangway.

"Damn rough luck on young Ginger," I heard him say. "I'll do what I can." His fast-sailing sampan went away to the eastward and disappeared round the sand-spit, whence all things came and went.

A fine big steamer came up from Bangkok, at about tiffin-time, and dropped her hook for an hour or two. I went off to her with the second mate across a sloppy, soupy sea. Our Chinese stroke-oar pulled long or short as he felt inclined, so did bow. Their movements seldom synchronised. They either dug too deep or spooned the water over us in bucketsful. We wobbled across the swell like a water-beetle stricken in the legs



with alternate paralysis and stringhalt. The second mate had newly come East. He was a smart lad out of smart ships and the display disagreed with him.

"Hie you! Keep steady time, can't you?" he snarled. "Watch my hand! Pull when I give the word. Now! Pull!—Pull!—That's better—Pull! Oh, darn your soul!" The bow, catching a crab, was on his back on the bottom boards. The mate, raving, changed our oarsmen about; but it was, if anything, worse.

"My God, what a show!" groaned the mate. "And before all those ships, too!" He turned to me. "I say, would you mind taking stroke for a minute? Just to show these blasted fools how to keep time? D'you mind?"

"Yes, I do," said I, "I don't want my ribs stove in. I'll take bow if you like and try to keep time with stroke."

I did my best, but keep time with stroke I could not; it was impossible to anticipate his next move. Our course looked a bit odd.

"Steady on!" said the mate, presently. "You're pulling the boat round!"

"Well, somebody's got to pull if we're not going stern first into that sand-bank," said I.

At that moment stroke surpassed himself by losing his oar overboard altogether, and we lost ten minutes and a hundred yards fishing for it. We gained the steamer's side at last, the mate pulling stroke, I bow, the two Chinese taking their ease like kings in the stern-sheets. They have a lot more sense than they are given credit for, the Chinese.

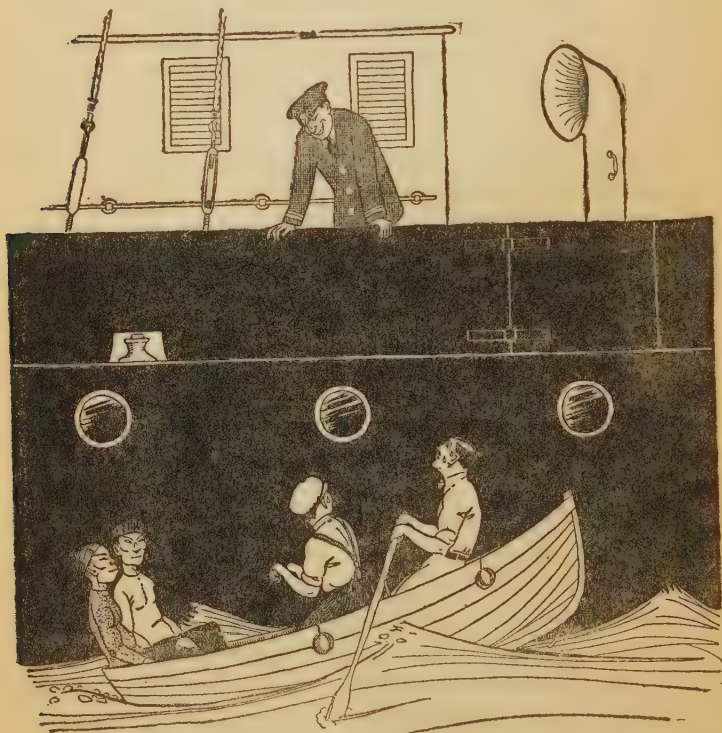
"Just taking them out for a row, I suppose?" said the steamer's mate, looking over the rail.

We wiped our dripping brows.

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

"Yes. On our ship we give them a treat every now and then. Got any beer?"

He led the way to his cabin, past crates of fowls, packed like herrings, rows of little humped bullocks



"Just taking 'em for a row, I suppose."

and stacks of pigs, snoozing each in its own cigar-shaped crate. The mate waved his hand towards the layers of slumbering pork. "Life's one sweet dream to them, a smile on every face. The dealers load 'em up with opium to keep 'em quiet. We had a gay time



coming up against the monsoon, though—bullocks doing the Charleston down the alley-ways, fowl-crates rolling like hoops, pigs trundling every way. Chief says one of 'em followed him down to the engine-room. See anything of the monsoon?"

"Yes, we noticed it. Hongkong bound, aren't you?"

"Yessir. The hook will be up in an hour. Christmas night will behold me shaking a leg in the Hongkong Hotel."

"Christmas night will behold us where we are, shaking dice for the last ginger ale," said I. "And that's why I'm here. There's a young lady aboard consigned to—engaged to a Mr. Fleece of Haiphong—"

"Not young Ginger?"

"The same," said I. "To ease the poor girl's mind, will you, on reaching Hongkong, notify her parents that she isn't drowned—yet; and, if possible, cable Mr. Flee—er—young Ginger that she and the eats are on their way and hope to arrive, if not for this Christmas, in reasonable time for next?"

He was sympathetic, promised to do what he could, and saw us to our boat.

"Merry Christmas!" said he, brightly, over the rail.

Said the second mate: "If I could reach you with this oar—"

We returned to our ship as we came, the mate and myself pulling, the two Celestials enthroned in the stern-sheets—I hope they enjoyed their outing.

The captain was pacing the deck.

"Where's Miss B.?" I asked.

"In her cabin, I believe," said he. "She'll hardly speak to me. I feel like the villain in a penny novel—"



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



ette, sundering young love—and all that. Blast those lighters!”

He retired to his cabin and presently the tinkle of the gramophone was heard, playing “The Yeoman of the Guard.” Afternoon dragged itself out. The missionaries sat side by side absorbed in exciting works on midwifery. Miss B. was not visible. Forward the deck passengers played mah-jong on the hatch covers, or slept. The Chinese firemen slumbered in rows along the scuppers, fishing-lines knotted to their big toes.

Towards evening a Norwegian steamer, losing patience, got her anchor in and stood eastward for Hong-kong. She broke some signal out as she went. I did not ask, but I have no doubt she, too, was wishing us a Merry Christmas. Humour of that kind is very infectious. The sun went down, night fell, nothing came from behind the sand-spit. The captain and I sat late.

“Looks as if we’re stuck here for Christmas,” he growled. “Ought to do something by way of celebration, I suppose—cheer the ship up. But what, I don’t know.”

“Looks as though all we can do is to hang our socks up and hope for the best,” said I.

“Looks like it,” said he.

I woke next morning to a frightful pandemonium of crashes, bumps and yells.

“Pirates!” thought I, and reached for my squirt.

The door opened and my boy entered with a cup of tea. Tea and pirates didn’t seem compatible. It struck me that I was looking rather foolish. “I was just thinking it was time this revolver was cleaned,” I observed in a casual manner. “Plenty noise about, how come?”



"Lighter come," said he.

I bounded on deck in pyjamas, met the missionaries and bounded back again, reappearing more suitably clad. The ship was surrounded by lighters; some, already loaded, were beating up for the sand-spit.

"So they've come at last!" said I to the first mate, who was tallying cargo out.

"At last! They commenced arriving by running slap into us at four bells this morning. D'you mean to say you didn't hear 'em? How d'you manage to sleep like that?"

"Clear conscience and pure living," said I. "You should try it yourself. Then we shan't be so late in Haiphong?"

"Shan't be late at all. Can't go to Pakhoi 'cos we'd be shot, so we're going straight through. Miss B. has been singing like a canary all the morning. D'you mean to say you didn't hear that either?"

We sailed at noon, the cloud lifted, a happy ship, the saloon festooned with colourful paper decorations put up by the pantry-boys. Miss B., looking prettier than ever, sat on the captain's right and beamed radiantly upon him, upon all of us.

She chattered merrily, everything and everybody was charming and Fate not such a bad old girl after all. The Scotch "chief" put on extra stokers, the monsoon withheld its wrath, the ocean flattened itself out in our path. All elements propitious and the firemen heaving coal regardless, we went ticking across the Tonking Gulf, the log showing figures which surprised itself.

"Got a chap sitting on the safety-valve?" I asked the "chief."

"The safety-valve," said he with fine contempt, "is a degenerate contraption I just pairfectly ignore."

We passed Norway Island the next morning and by



noon on Christmas Eve were off Hon-Dau, a round green islet with a lighthouse atop. The pilot was aboard us almost as soon as the signal broke, a swarthy, smiling, bearded person, like a comic-opera brigand.

"Have you a Mademoiselle B. aboard?" were his first words, and being assured that we were so honoured, bounded to the rail and shouted to his launch: "*Hola! Jaques! Elle est ici! Téléphonez Monsieur Gingaire immédiatement!*"

The whole South China coast seemed to be involved in *l'affaire Gingaire*. That done, he went smiling and bowing up to the bridge to give the news that while we were at sea a ship of the same company, the *Tung-Chow*, had been taken by pirates, her captain shot, and thirty thousand dollars' worth of bullion plundered. We steamed on up the Red River towards Haiphong, low mud banks on either hand; beyond them dismal swamps. Far away to the northeast the blue haze of mountains. Barges drifted to meet us, drawn by elliptic sails, which, with their many holes and multitude of bamboo slats, looked like giant skeleton leaves, autumn tinted. By late afternoon we had let go both anchors off our long-sought haven. Miss B. stood at the gangway, luggage beside her, fluttering her handkerchief to a speeding motor-boat.

The "chief" came on deck, wiping his hands with cotton-waste. He looked hot.

"Ah, weel," said he, "we're here in time and luvins' hear-rt's are u-nited—though I don't mind tellin' ye *now* that I verra near blew the ruddy ship to glory in doin' it." He grabbed me by the shoulder. "Tur-rn round quick, mon! Don't look! Here's young Ginger-r comin'!"

CHAPTER X

TONKING

Haiphong is the chief port and commercial capital of Tonking, which is a French protectorate. There is no doubt about it. The moment you land you know you are on French soil, evidences of Gallic culture are on every male face—and sometimes female. Beards! The official who comes aboard to count your vaccination marks is furred like a cinnamon bear. The fellow who takes down six pages of details relating to your number of legitimate wives, prison convictions and favourite flower is festooned with natural ivy. The customs-house sleuths, pegged-out, would make good Astrakhan rugs. Other civilised nationals only grow beards of sheer necessity: (a) because they have no chins at all; (b) are evading justice; (c) are taking the part of Moses in a film. But the French grow 'em for pleasure, training and trimming them into more curious shapes and fantasies than a Jap can get out of a dwarf shrub. It may be that the climate has something to do with it, the tropics being renowned for lush vegetation, but the beards in Tonking surpassed anything I have ever seen, even in France. For riotous quantity the Church easily carries the day. A missionary father coming down street before a quartering gale literally sweeps all before him, but, vanity in any form being forbidden the cloth, the decorative cultivation of the beard remains with the laity. And nobly they respond.

Haiphong showed some quaint and beautiful de-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



signs, but the palm goes to Hanoi and to a majestic gentleman who used, every evening, to make a late entrance (the better to command notice) into the dining room of the Métropole. He had a mane of black hair and an inky beard that flowed well down to the second button of his vest. It was Marcel waved, brushed, combed, oiled and perfumed, a lustrous, rippling torrent of hair. He would bide his time until all the diners were assembled, and then pass majestically through the tables, bowing, smiling, quietly conscious of his triumph, the great Assyrian masterpiece rippling its inky waves, gleaming with brilliantine, exuding voluptuous perfumes. The ladies sighed, forgot to eat. Poor devils of men with only a foot or two of hair to show buried their shamed appendages in the soup. It was the glory of Hanoi, the champion of Indo-China. *Monsieur, mes hommages!*

The native Tonkinese are not good-looking. They are small and well-made, but have very broad, protruding cheek-bones and usually a large wobbling protuberance in the cheek below, signifying the presence of a chewing nut. This habit of chewing betel obtains all over the Indo-Chinese peninsula, but is more rabid in Tonking than elsewhere; they chew as naturally as they breathe. The sidewalks, paths, roads, etc., are spattered with sanguinary expectorations, giving the impression that the country is suffering from an epidemic of hemorrhage.

Another distressing habit prevalent in Tonking and Annam is that of painting the teeth out with shellac. You see a bevy of damsels drifting down the street, slim, graceful, attractive little things, in the distance. "Hello!" say you to yourself, and cheer up a bit. Then they smile . . . ! Instead of the expected glint of ivory, empty black caverns stained with the



TONKING



betel's ghastly crimson gape before you. The effect is shocking, as though all their teeth had been bashed in at one brutal blow.

Black false teeth are exposed outside the native dentists' shops. Black is a passion with the Tonkinese. The better-class people, of both sexes, dress in close-



The Cartwheel Hat.

fitting black satin coats. The men wear neat little turbans of folded black cloth, the women do their hair up in a black cloth roll. The only variation in this national mourning is the rust-brown affected by the country people. The country women also have enormous flat cartwheel hats, made of palm-leaf, which serve equally well as umbrellas or parasols. A crowd of farmeresses afar off have the appearance of so



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



many occasional tables. When it is neither raining nor shining they carry their hats slung on their arms like the shields of Roman legionaries.

The Tonkinese are not in themselves a decorative people, but they are master decorators and are, moreover, industrious, docile (fortunately for the French), and have the best of manners. The mandarinates are recruited from all classes by competitive examination and one of the chief subjects on which the candidate must give satisfaction is that of social conduct. The world would be a happier place if prospective Western public men were put through the same sieve—for, after all, civility is the lubricant of civilisation.

Christmas Day in Haiphong was ushered in for me by a shrill fanfaronade of trumpets. I was having a shower-bath at the time, but, determined to miss nothing, draped myself in an inadequate towel and went to the window. It was a parade of the army. First went a detachment of the Colonial Infantry (who are supposed to be white, but are, in fact, mostly black) followed by a battery of 75s drawn by ponies about the size of goats; finally the Garde Indigène—little Annamites striding along barefooted, in smart khaki uniforms and conical hats. Tricolours flapped, trumpets brayed, drums went rub-a-dub, but the cream of the show was a six-foot hero with drawn cutlass and a medal-plated stomach, careering majestically along on a three-foot war-horse!

Somebody emitted a rousing "Hooray!" Every eye in the street turned upwards and then expanded with horrified amazement. Slowly I realized that it was me they were staring at, that I was wearing nothing but a bath-towel and not too much of that, that it was I who had hoorayed! Dreadful! I withdrew hurriedly and had a second shower-bath to quench my blushes.



I heard later that my slip was even more unfortunate than I thought, as at the very moment when I shoved my tousled head out of the window and gave piercing tongue there was a Very Distinguished Personage, dressed up in a tail-coat and tricolour ribbons, standing almost directly underneath, taking the salute!

Under the circumstances I thought Haiphong could stagger along more comfortably without me for a day or so and, the chance opportunely occurring, was speeding away over hill, dale and ferry for Hon-Gay shortly after tiffin. Hon-Gay is at the head of Along Bay and the port for the great Tonking open-cut coal-mines. We made our Christmas dinner that night off oysters picked within a stone's throw of the hotel and fresh strawberries grown in the open.

Along Bay is one of the three major attractions of Indo-China—Hué and Angkor being the other two. Our last morning at sea, steaming west from Hainan, I was on the bridge with the first mate. As we passed Norway Island he handed me his glasses and pointed north, "The coast of Tonking."

"Mountainous," I observed.

"Those aren't mountains, those are islands."

"But they look like a solid wall."

"So does a forest—at a distance. A forest of islands, that's what Along is, thousands of 'em."

Call it, rather, a stockade. A fence of mighty stone pillars, each one separate, starting sheer up out of the sea to the height of cathedral towers, the chain enclosing an area of nearly one hundred square miles.

We started out for the islands at dawn next morning in a consumptive tin motor pinnace, the Oil-merchant, the Engineer, two native boatmen and myself. The sea was dull and sulky, irritated on the surface by a chill land breeze. A flock of sampans issued from



the shadow of Hon-Gay cliffs and made quietly seawards, themselves shadows. We sat muffled in top-coats, saying no word, wishing the French would put more stuffing into their breakfasts. Then the sun rose up over China, a golden bombshell bursting its way through riven cloud wrack. The wind died down, the big bay shone like a plate of oxidised brass and then changed to deep turquoise. We unbuttoned our coats, lit pipes and recovered our powers of speech.

The islands grew nearer, innumerable crags, cones and pillars, rising to three and four hundred feet, assuming every shape and form. There were islands that took on grotesque human profiles, others that looked like crouching frogs, sugar loaves and ships under sail. There were prehistoric monoliths, church spires, crenelated Border towers, twin towers like those of Notre Dame de Paris, towers which leaned like that of Pisa, vast Roman triumphal arches and Egyptian pyramids. It was as though the architectural giants of the world, grown senile, eaten with age and weather, had been dumped down here to crumble quietly away. Close they stood, weary tower leaned towards corroded arch across passages so narrow one might jerk a stone across. Their bases were undermined by sea-wear, they seemed to be toppling one upon the other, millions of tons of rock reeling wearily this way and that. A thick, scabrous cement of oysters plastered their bases. Their sheer flanks were gnawed with fantastic holes and grottoes, like air-bubbles in faulty metal. Their tops were shaggy with palmetoes and trailing vines.

We squeezed under and into one of them, under an arch so low our five-foot flag-pole had to be dismounted—high tide would seal that entrance. The island was hollow, a hollow tooth of jagged rock, two



hundred and fifty feet high. Inside was a placid lake, a sheet of sun-burnished malachite—"The Circus," they call it. We chugged right round the beetling sides and out again, under the arch of oysters. There are monkeys high up on these unscalable crags, they say; soot-black all over with very long tails and canary top-knots that stand erect like circus-clowns'—a peculiar breed. They would be. Nothing that sprang from Along Bay could be ordinary.

There was a grotto I ought to see, the Oil-Boss said, and hailed a fishing sampan. The sampan came alongside, the engineer, myself and one of the boat-men went off in it. It was a ramshackle affair. The bottom was clearly visible through a large hole forward, also through two more aft. Under our added weight the water gushed in by the bucketful. Her proprietor had made no attempt to plug the holes; as long as the midships compartment was tight she would keep afloat and that was all he cared about. He was a painfully thin young man, clad in patched brown rags, with a rag tied about his head as though he had difficulty in keeping his jaws together. His wife was plumper and better dressed; she pushed the steering oar and issued orders. Under the bamboo tilt amidships sat the grandmother, cooking the morning meal over a charcoal pot: a hag so withered her head had the appearance of a mere fleshless skull, wrapped loosely in dirty tissue-paper. Her four grandchildren, stark naked, crouched around her, one eye on us, one on the pot.

The sampan bumped aground on a ridge of oyster-barbed rock, cutting another unheeded hole in her bottom, and we scrambled ashore, over more oysters, slicing our shoes unmercifully, and up the cliff face, up, up, fifty or sixty feet, and plunged into a dark hole in the rock. The hole expanded into a cavern capable of



sheltering two or three thousand people. Stalactites hung from ceiling to floor, strings of them, glistening white.

"Like a mouthful of nougat," said the Engineer; and it was, a yawning mouth with strings of nougat roped from jaw to jaw.

The boatman lit a lantern and the two of us went on, through a second black hole and along lofty catacombs wandering about in the bowels of the rock. Stalactites and stalagmites everywhere. The walls were sheathed with their drippings as with molten wax, frostily sparkling. Stalagmites spouted from the floor in frozen fountains, stalactites bulged from the walls in grinning gargoyles of frosted crystal, dripped from the ceiling in bunches of marble fruit, dripped from ceiling to floor in twisted alabaster columns. The lantern shone on the columns and behold! they were formed of suggestive figures, limbs, heads, trunks, knotted together. Here a leering satyr face, the head of a naiad, half seen, provocative, a rounded cheek, the hint of a smiling mouth, half veiled in marble, like a Rodin study. The torso of a woman; the curve of a thigh, of an arm, of breasts, naked and gleaming white, voluptuous, wanton, writhing together amid sagging draperies and revealing foliage. Formed by the drip of lime-water drip-dripping for thousands of years they might have been the pillars of some obscene temple hidden deep down in Stygian darkness.

We later explored another cavern in another island, worming down a tunnel like that of a prehistoric mine, working into a cave of blue ice with stone totem-poles sprouting up out of the floor and stone fungi blossoming from the roof, but though only two are known, it is probable that many of these limestone skyscrapers are honey-combed with like galleries and caverns contain-



TONKING



ing what marvels of *stalasso* formation, what mighty amphitheatres and secret jade-green lakes, only the black-and-yellow monkeys know. I can fancy them trooping down the dim-lit catacombs, crests on end, shivering with awe, prostrating themselves before the pagan columns, while some grey high priest chatters out the articles of Simian faith and the bats hang upside down from the leering gargoyles.



From the Grotto of Marvels, Along Bay.

We blundered out of the "Cavern of the Marvels" into the twilight of the outer cave. Sailors coming to Hon-Gay for coal had painted the names of their ships here and there on the rock slabs; Japanese mostly, scrawled in black and red hieroglyphics all over the place. Suddenly my eye caught some writing that was not Japanese. "Ship, *Sutherlandshire* . . ." followed by the date. I sat down abruptly on a rock and the



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



clock whirled back years and years. . . . "Ship, *Sutherlandshire*"!

A clear picture of her flashed back into my mind, lying in Burrard Inlet, Vancouver, she and a sister. Four-masted Clyde clippers they were, home-bound, but held up for want of hands. They were known as "the hungry shires," had difficulty in getting men and were not scrupulous in their recruiting methods—the Pacific Coast was a roughish strip in those days. We people living down Cordova and Water Streets went home warily o' nights, keeping in the middle of the road. We were likewise careful with whom we drank.

The sister got her complement at last and sailed, but the *Sutherlandshire* hung on and on. I used to go and look at her from the ferry-slip, her shapely gull-grey hull against the green Capilano shore, her flesh-coloured spars rising against the slopes of Grouse Mountain. The dismal wet Northwest winter was coming on, I had half a mind to toss my kit-bag down her fo'c'sle and take a run south out of it. But her reputed hungriness kept me wavering—then one morning she was gone. That winter, working half a mile underground in darkness and filth I thought long and often of the *Sutherlandshire*. She would be round Cape Stiff, chasing the flying fish up to the Line, close hauled to the southeast Trades.

I had not heard of her since, or given her a moment's thought—then suddenly that name, painted in red lead in a dim cavern in remote China seas! It was like a long forgotten incident startlingly revived in a dream. Sometime or other she had towed in through those fantastic islets (her long yard-arms almost brushing the crags on either hand) and loaded at Hon-Gay. I wondered where she was then, on what far seas she rode. Foundered, most likely, broken up or drudging



out her old age as a coal-hulk, tall spars gone, tied fast, stem and stern, up some dead creek. Well, well! I breathed a sentimental sigh over the ship I had never sailed in and clean forgotten—and wandered out into the sunlight.

We ran the pinnace ashore on a sandy beach under a sheer rock that overhung us like a toppling cathedral and lunched on cold chicken and warm bottled beer. The sun blazed. There was not a breath of wind, not a ripple on the lazy sea. The giant towers and spires showed double, standing toe to toe on their own perfect reflections. Had the world been turned upside down one would not have noticed it.

The Engineer fiddled with his watch, put it away and pulled it out again.

"Any one," said the Oil-Boss, "would think you had to catch a train."

The Engineer, unheeding, clicked his watch shut. "Yes," said he, "about now."

"What's about now?"

"I reckon it's about eight o'clock on Christmas morning in Philadelphia. My kid gets up at eight. Just about now she'll be finding her stocking and the things I sent her. I guess she'll raise some whoop. My God, I wish—"

"How old is she?"

"Two and a half."

"Then you've never seen her."

"I know that—but I'm seeing her now. Shut up, both of you!"

He pulled his hat over his eyes, lay back on the sand, concentrating on a white cot ten thousand miles away and a curly-headed baby shrieking with delight over her Chinese dolls.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



All over the Eastern States, at that moment, expectant infants were tumbling out of bed. In the British Isles they were being dragged to church, bells clashing across frosty meadows—and all that. The Oil-Boss and I clinked our beer bottles together and wished them everything of the best.

The rickshaw halted and I ran up the hotel steps. Late though it was, a light shone from the café, somebody was still up. As I passed the café the somebody within howled my name, howled it again. It was evident that if I did not respond, the howler, whoever he was, would howl the place down. Wearily I turned back. It was William Raines, ship's engineer, half-drunk and loaded for bear. He was sitting at one of the small marble tables with a man I had never seen before. An Annamite waiter lounged against the far wall yawning his head off—otherwise the café was empty. William greeted me noisily.

"By God, I've been looking all over town for you to go on the fling with me."

I thanked my stars his search had been unavailing.

"Too late now, anyway," said I.

"That's right, Bill," the companion corroborated. "Far too late. Let's go back to the ship."

"Oh, to hell with you and the ship!" William snapped. "You make me ache! All the blessed night it's been (mimicking) 'Let's go back to the ship!' You're a damn sociable chum for a night out, you are!"

"Only trying to keep you out of trouble," said the other, mildly.

"But damme! I don't want to be kept out of it! That's what I come ashore to look for! I glory and delight in trouble in all its branches. If it hadn't been



for you, I'd ha' landed that policeman the crowning wallop of his career."

"And been landed in jug for it."

"Man," said William solemnly, "if they want to put me in jug *here*, they'll have to mobilise the entire bloody army."

The other man finished his lemonade and rose. "Are you coming?"

"No," said William. "Oh, sorry! I never introduced you." He made an indicatory sweep of his brandy glass. "This is Long Mac of the *Cha-ling*—or begging his pardon (with unction), Mister Albert Sikes MacTaggart—ahem!"

We nodded. I liked the looks of the abused Long Mac: a tall, spare, serious person, carefully dressed, with a heavy gold cable strung across his waistcoat. "Pleased to make your acquaintance," he murmured with grave formality.

"Have a B and S?" said I.

He shook his bald head. "No, thank you; I'm an abstainer. Bill—for the last time—are you com—?"

"No!" thundered Bill.

We heard Long Mac's number eleven boots tramping out through the empty hall.

"Makes me ache!" said Bill.

"Seems a respectable sort of chap," said I, yawning.

Bill grunted. "By gosh, that's it! You've touched the spot—respectable! Aye, he's respectable all right. He's so goddam respectable I feel like smashing something when I go out with him."

"Then why go out with him?"

"Oh, I dunno. We were in the same shops in Sunderland as boys—and I couldn't find any one else to-night." He studied his glass and grinned bitterly.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



"Damned respectable, Mister Blooming Albert Sikes MacTaggart, Esquire—heh! He'll mix with me here in Haiphong, mark you—but not in Hongkong. He's a respected citizen *there*, with a very respectable house, bought and paid for, and a highly respectable wife—also paid for. Met her when he was on the Tientsin run, a governess going up to Peking. Mac was civil to her, as he always is, nothing more, but by the time they were into the Pai-ho they were engaged. Mac was nearly off his head with surprise and delight. A refined, educated woman, governess to the best families, marrying an ugly devil of a ship's pusher, like him! Couldn't think how it happened. But I guess the lady knew all right; she was out of a job, and knew what was coming. They were married right away—she insisted on it. Mac, shining like a port light, brought her south to Hongkong, bought a nice little house and the best of furniture on the installment plan, put the treasure in it and went to sea again.

"When he reached Wei-hei-wei he found a cable to say she had gone to the hospital for a serious operation. She was in and out of the hospital for two years, with one thing and another. The woman was rotten and she knew it and grabbed the first man who would see her through. I was on the Canton-Shanghai run at the time and we were lying off the Shameen one morning when a Greek fellow comes aboard.

"'You are Mr. Raines, I believe,' says he. 'Could I see you private for a minute?'

"I took him to my cabin. 'Spit,' said I.

"'Seen you about a bit, lately,' says he, 'over in Macao—and other places.'

"'What business is that of yours?' says I.

"'I thought maybe a bit of easy money would



TONKING



come handy,' says he. 'Easy as kiss your hand.'

" 'How?' says I.

" 'Running morphine to Shanghai. There's a hundred dollars Mex profit per bottle on it,' says he.

" 'That's a big price,' says I. 'Who pays it?'

" 'The Russian women,' says he. 'They'll sell their souls for it. Can do?'

" 'Ye dirty dago pimp! I'd cut my hands off before I'd soil 'em at that trade,' says I. 'Moreover we're not running to Canton any more.'

" 'With that I hove him overboard to be picked up by his sampan—and that's that. I am in the Coast Officers' Club in Hongkong a week later when I meets Long Mac looking like his own chief mourner.

" 'Been searching for you everywhere,' says he. 'I'm in awful trouble.'

" 'Cough it up,' says I and he coughs. 'It's that wife of his. She's ill again and he don't know how to pay for it. The installments on his house, furniture and life insurance are falling due as well. If he don't pay up they'll close on him and when his highly respectable wife comes out of the hospital he won't have no highly respectable house to put her in.'

" 'It'll kill her,' he groans. 'She was a governess, you know, in the best families.'

" 'The point of it is, of course, that he wants to borrow money, two thousand dollars Mex. Happened I had it, having been lucky of late.

" 'See here,' says I. 'I'm due for home leave in March and I can't spare it.'

" 'I'll pay you back before that,' says he. 'So help me God!'

" 'I lent it to him. I thought he would pay. He's honest.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



"In March I was back in Hongkong, ready to go home. The *Cha-ling* was in port and I glimpsed Long Mac coming out of a Chinese *hong* in Des Vœux Street—along with another man. By and by I met him alone.

"‘Come into Bessy’s Bar and I’ll pay you that money,’ says he—and he did, every cent."

William Raines finished his brandy at a gulp and fumbled for his hat. "I'll go home now."

"Yes, but—got any idea how he raised the money?" I asked.

"The man I saw him with in Des Vœux was the Canton Greek."

William flung a note to the Annamite, crushed his hat on his head and stood up, reeling slightly.

"Mister Highly Respectable Albert Sikes MacTaggart, Esq.—heh! Odd, ain't it, how to save one rotten woman a decent man will rot a hundred others?"

One can go from Haiphong to Hanoi by steamer, road or rail. The river being slow and dull and the road passing sloppy, I went by rail—and felt most uncomfortable. It took me some time to realise what was wrong. A glance out of the window revealed palms, papayas and groves of bamboos fleeting past.

"This is the tropics," said I. "It can't be—no, of course not—imagination."

I closed all the ventilators, nevertheless, and lit a pipe. My chattering teeth would barely grip it.

"Tropics or not," said I, "I'm darned if I'm going to shudder to bits"—so I opened my bag, stripped and redressed in my thickest winter wear. In the middle of the operation the train halted and a lady entered the compartment. I was too chilled to care, she too sensi-



ble to mind—and was, in fact, very kind about my underclothing, thought we did that sort of thing better in England than in France. I agreed—male underclothing. We discussed the subject, wool versus cellular, long pants versus short, most of the way to Giam, where she got out and I rumbled on into Hanoi, over the superb bridge that spans the Red River.

Hanoi is the administrative capital of the five territories that comprise Indo-China—Tonking, Laos, Annam, Cochin-China and Cambodia. Its name is modern. The spot whereon it stands has changed names even more often than St. Petersburg, Petrograd, Leningrad, Trotskyville—or whatever they are calling it this week. As far back as history reaches, the Chinese have been taking Hanoi, the Annamites retaking it, the Chinese taking it back, the Annamites kicking them out—and so on. Each conqueror named it according to his fancy—printed letter-heads were sheer waste. One conqueror, Li-Thai-To, called it “Thang-long” from a golden dragon that came buzzing over the city to welcome him. Others dreamed of white horses and such like.

Li lived in a pavilion of four stories painted with red varnish and decorated with dragons, storks, and female divinities. He wore an undergarment of yellow and an outer of purple and went about in a vehicle dragged by slaves. This was in the twelfth century. The first Jesuit missionaries appeared in 1626, and in 1638 a Dutch ship, the *Ryp*, worked right up to Hanoi (or Đông-dô, as it was being called that morning) and established a trading-post. The English came shortly after, built a handsome “factory” and remained twenty years. In 1873 French troops, led by the celebrated explorer, Francis Garnier, occupied the place under the



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



pretext that they had only come to restore it to the authority of the Annamite Emperor—just as they have lately occupied Morocco for the benefit of a puppet Emperor, kept under collar and chain at Rabat.

A long and costly war followed, culminating in the treaties of 1883 and 1884, whereby Tonking became a protectorate, not of His Annamite Majesty, who seemed to have been forgotten somehow, but of the French. More war, still more costly, followed. Tonkinese rebels, assisted by the notorious Black Flags from China, fought a mosquito campaign which kept twenty-five thousand French troops painfully hopping for eight years. The French bayoneted their way into the principal towns and were promptly bottled up in them. Successive Governors-General sat in Hanoi, writing home for more money and more troops, the smoke of burning villages plainly discernible from the residential windows. At length came the beloved Paul Bert with a new policy. He died, worn out, in seven months, but the good seed he had sown was sedulously cultivated by his successor, de Lanessan, and by 1893 the country was more or less under control.

Hanoi is an administrative town and little else. It is stuffed with a host of *fonctionnaires*, big and little, who lick stamps by day and then go home and tick off the hours to their pensions, growing enormously fat and hairy in the process. Each man knows the others' salaries to a *sou* and, like good republicans, he who draweth ten piastres a day mixeth not with him who draweth but nine-ninety. The town boasts an imposing theatre and several moving-picture houses where early experiments in cinematography are exposed nightly. I was there seven days, coming and going, and rain fell continuously. The French, in their ironic



TONKING



way, call this winter deluge the *crachin*, or "spitting," to distinguish it from the real rains. Should necessity drive me back to Tonking when it is really raining I shall pack a diving-suit.

The Frenchman is a master of the art of putting a tree in its proper place, and the European quarter is most attractively laid out in bosky parks and avenues. The villas are pure French, making no concessions to climate, and, were it not for palms, bougainvillea, etc., they might be standing in some pleasant outskirt of Paris—Neuilly, for instance. In the centre of the town is a tree-bordered sheet of water known as the Little Lake, a charming spot. Legend has it that in the fifteenth century a certain Le-Lo'i was a fisherman on this lake. One day, casting his net into the water, he drew forth not a fish, but a splendid sword, flashes of lightning darting from its blade. Guessing that it was sent him for some high purpose he set about incensing the people against their Chinese oppressors. Putting himself at their head, Excalibur in hand, he hove the invader out and made himself king at Hanoi. The great work done, he thought it fitting to sacrifice himself to the genie of the lake and processed thither in full state. But it was not to be. As the company reached the brink the sky was rent by a terrific thunder-clap, the wonder-sword leapt out of its scabbard and, changing into a green dragon, plunged into the water and disappeared. A small pagoda commemorating the event stands to this day.

Out in the lake is another temple, built on a tiny mud-bank called euphemistically "The Jade Island." One evening I wandered over the "rainbow" bridge into the pagoda. A young priest, a stub of dribbling candle in his hand, showed me round. There was little



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



to see—a stone gong, two bronze bells, a lacquered altar with a few offerings laid out before a fearsome Chinese war-god, the whole feebly lit by chandeliers held in the beaks of copper cranes. An elderly *bonze* knelt before the altar chanting aloud from a little book and punctuating his sentences with knocks on a wooden drum. My guide walked round and round him, holding his candle high, the wax spattering the tiles, the copper feathers of the cranes, but the *bonze* took no notice, went on droning and drumming—we might have been men of air. From the Rue Francis Garnier came the blare of motor-horns. It sounded odd—there. Thanking my guide in the coin of the country, I went outside. It was nearly dark. Lights in the surrounding shops and houses cast long wavy reflections over the surface of the Little Lake. The waters whence the flaming sword had come were strewn with golden fiery swords.

Under an open kiosk stands an inscribed stone, dedicated to the sage Van-Xu'o'ng, a doctor of moral perfection. A child knelt before the stone, hands folded, motionless, alone. I stared at him, lit a pipe, strolled round the islet and back again. The child had not stirred. It seemed uncanny that a child so young could keep so still. Could he be asleep—or dead? I prowled round him, stealthily. He was neither asleep nor dead; he was meditating! Meditating at ten! Myself at ten!—fighting with errand-boys, tying cans on dogs' tails. . . . I had a sudden feeling that I had better be gone. The legends of the infant Buddha became suddenly possible. This was no place for such as I. I tiptoed out of it, entered a café in the Rue Paul Bert, drank three *vermouths mélangés* and read “La Vie Parisienne” from cover to cover, to adjust



TONKING



the balance, as it were. Nevertheless the scene comes before me to this day, the rapt child bowed before the stone, the night mist creeping, the bright swords in the water—and I wonder. . . .



A Gentleman of Tonking.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE OF MARVELS

Hanoi is the centre of Tonkinese art; its craftsmen excel in the manufacture of furniture, in wood-carving, in lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlay, in silk embroidery, in the making of dresses, masks, crowns and other fanciful paraphernalia for the native actor. Their



The Great Bronze Buddha, Hanoi.

shops were a constant delight, but the best thing of all I stumbled on quite by chance—as is usually the case.

I was meandering about in the native town one rainy morning when a certain house drew my attention. It stood on a corner. The door giving on the main street was guarded by a heavy steel grille, padlocked and



barred. The side facing on the side street was protected by a redoubtable iron fence. Behind the fence were two tiers of cages containing some mixed poultry, several monkeys, a civet cat, two black pigs and a bear. The roof bristled with figures of painted tin, elephants, tigers, flying-fish and comic little Chinamen bestriding dolphins. I peered at the strange menagerie, through the fence and then, shifting round to the front door, poked my nose through the bars.

A comely Annamite girl in a maroon dress was lounging against the inner door, smoking a cigarette. I withdrew my snout hastily, apologised for its intrusion, and prepared to move on. The girl looked at me curiously and then said, in French, "What are you?"

I told her I was British.

She considered for a moment, asked me to wait, disappeared, to reappear later with a second woman, a middle-aged person with a flat Mongolian face, dressed in soiled yellow silk with a fur-lined Chinese coat slung, cloak-wise, across her shoulders. A collar of pearls clasped her fat throat and a tail of greasy hair hung over one jade-studded ear. Her dirty fingers were cased in brilliant rings.

She shuffled up to the grille and screwing up her eyes so that they became mere oblique slits, scrutinised me through the bars as though I were some exotic beast—which, doubtless, I was. She examined me from the crown of my hat to the soles of my shoes and shuffled back into the house muttering something to the maroon girl, who said, "Madame invites you to enter."

I had my suspicions as to the nature of that establishment, but my curiosity was up, and curiosity with me is the better part of discretion. I replied that I had great pleasure in accepting Madame's invitation; whereupon the girl unlocked the padlock, drew the



numerous bolts, let me in and buttoned the whole lot up again behind me.

"*Il faut faire attention aux voleurs,*" she explained.

"Er—oui, naturellement," I murmured, by no means reassured.

"*Entrez,*" said she.

I prepared to enter when from the interior came a frightful explosion of snarls and through the inner door burst a deluge of dogs, ferocious great black and yellow chows, all with their mouths gaping, coming straight for me. I put the first fellow out of countenance by stuffing the best part of my boot into it and by that time the maroon girl had come to the rescue. She snatched up some object (which I afterwards discovered to be a small carved elephant-tusk) and waded into those poor dogs as though she were carpet-beating. In a second they had deluged back whence they came, as if the devil were after them.

"*Ils sont aussi contre les voleurs,*" said the girl.

"Lot of 'em about?" I asked. "Thieves?"

She shook her head. "*Pas beaucoup. Ils ont grande terreur de Madame.*" Adding blandly, "*Elle est sorcière.*"

"Hell!" said I. "I mean, how interesting!"

"*Entrez!*" she invited.

The inner chamber yawned as black as the pit. Inside lurked Madame, the sorceress, surrounded by what? Black panthers? Snakes? W-ugh! However, there was no backing out. The gate was padlocked behind me and the maroon girl had a kind face. I stepped into the black hole, and, click!—it lit up with strings of red and white lamps and I beheld the most bizarre and unexpected place I was ever in.

It was a large room, stuffed from floor to ceiling and wall to wall with an amazing assortment of valuables



and junk—a cross between the Wallace Collection and a dime museum. There were carved elephant-tusks six feet long, ships in bottles, decayed snakes in bottles, ebony elephants, stuffed rats and owls ragged with moth, tarnished birds of paradise dithering in their cases. Swords forged by the most celebrated smiths in old Japan, Samurai armour and panels of lovely Cantonese embroidery hung cheek by jowl with hideous crayon enlargements in cheap gilt frames. Pictures by great Chinese artists—landscapes by Tang-Yin, swallows and bamboos by Li-kong-li—glowed flank to flank with grocers' presentation calendars. German gilt clocks (all telling different times and none correct) ticked side by side with priceless Ming ceramics, Pho dogs and "vases of the amiable girl." Modern French terra-cotta statuettes flaunted their scant draperies before centennial Buddhas. Birmingham tinware mingled unblushingly with bronzes of the Tcheou dynasty, which saw Confucius. A graceless Teddy Bear leaned against an image of the goddess Kuan-Yin, his arms about her in a stiff embrace. A papier-mâché crocodile and a toy aëroplane dangled from the ceiling amid a multitude of glittering, albeit lampless, glass chandeliers.

Over all hung a smell of mixed animal and incense. An astonishing place!

I gasped. Came a chuckle from beside me. It was Madame, her expansive countenance expanding still further with gratification at my surprise.

"*Jolie—eh?*" she squeaked, and plucked me by the sleeve. "*Venez!*"

She led me in and out among the overloaded tables and round the room, displaying with equal pride cabinets of priceless King-to and Tang-Ying porcelain and pale blue Chang of the eleventh century; jade and



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



amber ornaments; Japanese netsuke, quaint ivory animals, dragons and men—and a clock-work motor-car which she insisted on winding up and sending for circular tours about the floor.

"Coûte beaucoup cher," she twittered, with an inclusive sweep of her grimy, glittering hand. *"Beaucoup riche, moi."* She paused before a life-sized portrait of a girl in the traditional splendour of an Annamite actress. *"Moi,"* she explained, and swayed about on her thick hips. *"Danse, moi—quand jeune."*

There were at least a dozen portraits of Madame, some painted, some crayon enlargements. Here she was as a Chinese actress, there a Manchu princess, again in European attire, in the puff-sleeved, wasp-waisted fashion of twenty years ago. I asked her how she liked the corsets and she grimaced and rubbed her tummy tenderly.

"Insupportable—I only wore them long enough to be photographed." She pointed upwards. *"Look!"*

I looked. It was a picture of the Shameen, Canton, crudely daubed on glass, reminiscent of pictures of Naples that sailors used to bring home. Click! Madame pressed a switch and the picture lit up from behind, lights glowed in the house windows, plumes of flame issued from the steamer-funnels.

"Jolie—eh? Venez!"

She plucked me on again. We entered an inner room. Click! More festoons of lamps sprang to life, red, green and yellow. One wall was entirely covered with an immense Annamite landscape, rivers and sampans, forests and mountains. Here were carved beds and washstands, settees of red and gold lacquer, tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl, stools, cupboards of precious tracwood piled up with the profusion of a furniture-store and heaped with tiger-skins, leopard-



THE HOUSE OF MARVELS



skins, brass cranes, bronze incense-burners—and india-rubber dolls and rabbits; more junk and treasure indiscriminately mixed.

"Look!" She clicked a switch and a glass case glowed with red and blue lights. In it were three little mechanical ballet girls and a music-box. She wound it up and it jangled out a rusty valse while the three little dancers jerkily revolved. "*Jolie—eh?*"

Three yearling babies rolled about on a blackwood bed in charge of the maroon girl and another hand-maid. Madame pointed them out to me, holding up three fingers. "*Jumeaux—triplets. Mother dead, father dead. I have adopted them.*" She patted her plump bosom. "*Bon cœur, moi. Venez!*"

On we went into a dark passage, dark as the grave. Madame fumbled for a switch. Click! But no light came. She spat an oath and addressed something down in the thick gloom of the corner. It seemed to be an animal of some sort and it was not responsive. Again Madame commanded it and, still getting no response, drew back her foot and let fly her embroidered slipper. Something stirred in the gloom, something began to creep across the floor. What on earth was coming now? A cobra—or what? A one-legged chicken hopped out, followed by the most horrible elderly dwarf, swinging himself on his hands, his shrunken legs coiled up under him like withered vine-tendrils. His mouth was twisted sideways and he had but one eye and that was fully an inch higher up than the puckered socket of the other. He hoisted himself into the light of the doorway and squatted there snivelling and shivering.

Madame snapped out an order and he prostrated himself and, sitting up, uncoiled his beastly limbs for my delectation. "*Drôle—eh?*" said Madame, oozing



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



pride. "I have adopted him also, give him food and shelter." Again she thumped her bosom. "A kind heart, I. Come!"

The mannikin crept snivelling back to his corner, the deformed chicken hopping after, and we went out into a courtyard filled with potted shrubs clipped and trained to resemble pagodas, junks and elephants. Red and blue dragons were painted on the walls and in an ornate basin tiny yellow turtles and goldfish disported amid a fleet of derelict clockwork submarines and sailing yachts such as children buy at the seaside. Madame fished a turtle out of the tank, squashing its head back with her thumb. "I will make medicine of this for a sick Hindu woman," said she. "I have a kind heart."

She donned a conical white hat against the rain and conducted me forth to re-inspect the cages, pointing out what I had not noticed before: namely, that their contents were freaks. She stirred the unfortunate animals up with a stick the better to display their abnormalities. The goose had four wings, the cock nine spurs, one of the bloated pigs had six legs, the other two mouths, an extra tongue lolling from a slit in its cheek—and I know not what else. Every living thing in the grotesque place was a monstrosity. It occurred to me that the triplets were there simply because they were triplets. Had they arrived singly they might have starved.

The sole exception was the bear, chafing his mangy hide against the bars. Madame admitted his unworthiness. He was only an ordinary bear and ate enormously; she maintained him out of pure altruism. Once more she referred to her riches and her kind heart. Poor devil! I expect he wished she had neither and he out of his cramped prison, roaming the jungle again, self-supporting, but free.



THE HOUSE OF MARVELS



We wandered back into the first room, where little silver cups of some sweet Chinese wine awaited us at the hands of the maroon girl. We sat side by side on a red lacquer settee, Madame and I, as sociable as two old tabbies. She drank to my prosperity, I to her almond eyes, while above us the coloured lamps glowed and three music-boxes jangled out three different tunes.

My last impression of the place was Madame in her yellow silk, her flat face radiating good humour, bobbing farewell to me through the barred gate, the maroon girl shooting the bolts back into place, smiling also.

CHAPTER XII

TO YUNNAN-FU

I left Hanoi in the grey dawn of a rainy day for Yunnan-Fu, away up over the mountains of China. The railway follows the course of the Red River, which traverses Tonking from northwest to southeast and is to the Colony what the Nile is to Egypt. It irrigates immense areas of paddy and then carries the resultant rice to market, supporting in its wide valley the densest and richest population in Indo-China. Hats off to the Song-Ka!

For all that, like most opulent things, its prosperous basin is not very interesting. All the morning the train rumbled along over a flat plain that was like a vast checkerboard, being patterned with rice-plots, some dry, some with the young shoots sprouting up through the water in fresh green tufts. Here and there was an ordered row of areca palms and a clump of feathery bamboos, betokening the site of a farm-house. Here and there a native, protected from the *crachin* by a conical hat and a palm-leaf raincoat, laboriously spooned water from one plot to another. Here and there a cultivator plodded knee-deep in ooze, guiding an invisible harrow and a floundering, mud-plastered buffalo. Here and there small herds of buffaloes grazed along the dyke-sides, each with a guardian infant straddling its rump and a buffalo-bird perched on its withers on the outlook for an unwary tick. A native child mounts its buffalo after breakfast and spends the

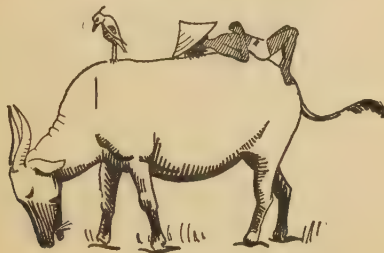


TO YUNNAN-FU



day on it, camping comfortably on any portion of the dismal and cantankerous brute, and in any position.

Buffaloes are not sympathetic to Europeans. A native told me it was the *smell* they object to. Coming from one who had probably had but one bath in his life (and that involuntary) and who reeked to high heaven with palm-oil and fish-sauce, this amused me



In any position.

quite a lot. My personal belief is that it is the white man's absence of scent that unnerves the buffalo. Accustomed as it is to bipeds whose presence is odoriferously acclaimed at rifle-range, when a smell-less European shows up it imagines he is something uncanny—a spook or belike—and charges bald-headed. Anyhow, that's what I prefer to think—but the fact remains that buffaloes don't love white men and are constantly putting them in awkward and humiliating positions.

An acquaintance of mine named Henri, a large, martial man—Legion d'Honneur (*deuxième class*) and Croix de Guerre (*avec palmes*) was in pursuit of snipe near Kien-An when, without any preliminaries whatever, a buffalo came for him, head down. Henri blazed both barrels at it—which, containing bird-shot, served only to irritate the creature still further—and did squirrel exercise up the nearest palm. He spent a



tedious morning reciting Gautier's "Ce Que Disent Les Hirondelles" (the only thing he could remember) over and over to the coker-nuts, while his besieger whanged its empty head against the trunk below. At 2 P.M., or thereabouts, a naked brat of tender years trotted across the paddy and addressed the tree-top. The buffalo was



Chased it, blubbering, home.

wanted for a job of work; could the Lord of the Earth and Protector of the Poor graciously spare it for an hour or two? The Protector of the Poor (up among the palm-fronds) thought he graciously could; whereupon the infant produced a piece of bamboo, knocked seven bells out of the buffalo and chased it, blubbering, home. Henri, Legion d'Honneur (*deuxième classe*) and Croix de Guerre (*avec palmes*) descended and went home too.



But we must on to Yunnan.

The morning, as I said, was dull, but by afternoon the sun came out, the mountains were closing in on either hand and the train was whisking in and out among the foothills like a kitten chasing its own tail. The hills were grown thick with scrub, with clumps of plume-headed pampas-grass and groves of bamboo. Here and there were scattered farms protected against tigers by stockades of sharpened stakes. A wild country. Now and then one caught glimpses of the Red River with mighty rafts of bo-de wood floating down to the match-factories of the delta, and sampan fishermen casting their nets into the greasy red waters.

Night fell. The only other European occupant of the train, a private of Colonial Infantry who had embarked, very drunk, at Hanoi, blundered through into the first-class and offered me peanuts from his greasy cap. He was bound for Laokai and, now his temporary exultation had worn off, was very depressed about it. He was being sent there by way of punishment. His colonel had had him on the carpet. "See here, my child," said the colonel, "if you would mend your ways and give up drink you might become a corporal." "My colonel, when I am drunk I think I am a general," he had replied—and was sent to Laokai. He didn't suppose he'd ever leave it. He had two years more to serve and Laokai and its fevers would get him before that. He was a large, blue-eyed Norman from Fécamp; very fair and boyish he looked among all those yellow skins. I suppose he'd got himself into trouble at home; trouble is the best recruiting sergeant for France's Colonial armies.

I dined alone in the bare *salle-à-manger* of Laokai's solitary hotel. There was some sort of dinner party in progress in an inner room. The veranda door



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



opened quietly and through the crack came a large bony nose, followed by a peaked face and eventually the whole body of a little wizened private of the Foreign Legion in a uniform three sizes too big for him. He darted his bright, cunning eyes around the empty *salle* and then, tiptoeing across to the door of the inner room, peered through the glass and beckoned. Entered stealthily two more Legionaries. At a sign from their leader they drew mouth-organs from their pockets and commenced to blast and wheeze with excruciating vigour, the little man beating time with his forefinger with all the flourish of an orchestra conductor. I presumed that their officer was dining within and this was a serenade in his honour. Nor was my presumption incorrect.

The glass door burst open and a lieutenant dashed out. He put his toe under the conductor and flung himself upon the musicians, thrashing them furiously with his napkin. They fled for their lives, across the room, out of the door, along the veranda and into the dark, the officer on their heels, plying his napkin—he was evidently not musical. I laughed so much I spilt soup over myself and ruined a perfectly good tie.

Dinner finished, I strolled out into the town, a miserable little place consisting of a single street set high on the river-bank, flanked by dim-lit native stores. I wandered past a guard-house, outside which a few listless soldiers sat in silence, their cigarette-ends shining like glow-worms, turned a corner and lo! there was a Chinese theatre in full swing.

A mere open box of cane-slats and palm-thatch perched above the river mud on tall bamboo stilts. The orchestra clashed their cymbals and banged their drums, the actors in their traditional finery of gold, green and scarlet strutted and squeaked, while behind



the little high-perched shrine of glowing light and colour rose sombre mountain-peaks with moonlit cloud-wrack flying over.

Laokai stands at the confluence of the Nam-Ti and Red rivers and is the frontier post. Across the Nam-Ti is China. At dawn next morning I walked over the railway bridge into China, past the sentries of two nations, and took the train. An officer with a tin sword, a star hanging by one thread, and carpet-slippers, strolled up and inspected me with a jaundiced eye. A platoon of soldiers, some mere children and barefooted, shambled into the station and were put away in the front truck as a guard against brigands. The mountains swarmed with these bright spirits, I was told; the service could only be run by day.

Gradually the train filled up, passengers, baggage and live-stock piling in together. A party staggered in with a live pig slung on a pole, wrong-side up and squalling like the devil. Also a second party with a roast pig borne honourably on a litter, browned to a turn, shining with varnish, beatifically smiling—death has its dignity. The whistle blared and away we went, following the Nam-Ti up into the frowning hills.

Some miles out the train halted and the noble dead pig and his ignoble live companion (still squalling) were disembarked; likewise baskets of fruit and fire-crackers. Two men got out and blew a call on horns that sounded not unlike bagpipes. The crags repeated the summons, once, twice and again, growing fainter and fainter. There was to be a feast, seemingly, though where, I could not say; there was no sign of any habitation, nor any place where man might build.

On we went, leaving the two horn-players wringing shrill, sweet echoes out of the hills. Streamers of mist went eddying overhead, wrapped themselves round in-



visible peaks, came puffing out of black gorges; the valley might have been filled with smoke. The track was a mere ledge nicked out of the mountainside along which the train appeared to propel itself by serpentine wriggles and twists, rumbling over spider bridges of lace-like ironwork, panting over embankments which, it would seem, must crumble under its weight, and, when inextricably cornered, burrowing into the earth like a rabbit. In one place it came out of the sheer cliff, flung itself across a cantilever bridge over three hundred feet above the glistening cataract below and plunged head-first into another sheer cliff. Bamboos, wild banana, and myrtle with a pink peach-like blossom, grew in tangled profusion along the track-side. Waterfalls fell two and three hundred feet, looking like shining silver ribbons pinned against the mountain-flanks. Below us always was the Nam-Ti, jade green, brawling over yellow rocks.

There was no other European passenger on the train. In the next compartment sat a wealthy old Chinaman in a long ash-grey coat with a fur collar. He hawked and spat without cease. From sunrise to sunset I could hear him at it, noisily clearing his throat followed by a liquid explosion; it is the National Anthem of China.

The guard came in, ate his lunch and shared a bottle of wine with me. He was a plump, pinkish person, with a voice that never deserted a quiet monotone, but, though he did not look the part, he was an adventurer. This guard business on the Yunnan railway was only an episode, he told me. He was seeing the country and paying his way. As soon as his curiosity was satisfied he would move on. In this manner he had already seen a good slice of the world and had held all sorts of jobs from ganger on the Trans-Andean railway to



labour recruiter in the New Hebrides, working, I have no doubt, with quiet efficiency at all of them until he had seen everything worth seeing and then quietly removing himself. He held, he said, a second mate's ticket, was a passable mechanic, could drive an engine and paint houses, but the most useful of his accomplishments—though he didn't particularly care for it—was cooking. A good cook could get work anywhere.

Then he picked up his revolver and his money-bag and went away up the train, stepping over crates of fowls and ducks, recumbent human forms, cooking-pots, babies and drums of Standard Oil. I could hear the soft voice bidding passengers take their choice of paying their fares or being hove off and over a precipice.

All the morning we puffed and climbed, and all the afternoon, the train working from side to side and ledge to ledge wherever it could get foothold, a pigmy thing wriggling painfully skywards through and over a chaos of landslides, gorges and mountain-scarps. A caterpillar toiling up the flank of Wall Street would give a proportionate idea.

We halted at length at a tank station, marked 1165 metres above sea-level—the sharpness of the air betokened as much. There was a row of booths roofed with flattened Standard Oil tins on the precipice side—a push would have sent them headlong. Boys and women hawked roast sweet-potatoes up and down the train, also sugar-cane and bowls of suspicious-looking food. Pigs and dogs, seeking what they might devour, rooted about under the train.

A bunch of pack-ponies with running sores on their backs stood huddled under the crag, and there were plenty of people about, though where they all came



from, unless they dropped from the imminent clouds, was difficult to say. The shelf was as isolated as some gull-infested crevice on the Bass Rock. The people were of a widely different type to those of the lower valleys, thicker built and swarthier. Notable were some cheerful ruffians armed with muskets and flat-headed spears, and one or two squat but dressy ladies wearing huge red, black and white turbans, heavy silver tassels in their ears and dresses that were covered with crude, colourful embroidery.

A French engineer who emerged from the station-house nursing a chow puppy, told me that the *belles* were of the Méo, or Big Head, tribe. Asked who the armed men were, he replied that they were just ordinary mountaineers—or brigands—the terms were synonymous. The dwellers in those parts might be said to live by cutting one anothers' throats. A chap cultivated his yam-patch on Monday and on Tuesday whistled a friend and said, "It's a fine day, Archibald; let's go and shoot somebody." All villages were stockaded, and parties of armed men kept constant guard. Only the day before he himself had had a brush with brigands. Taking a chance of skipping the rails, he had let his trolley go all out down a grade of one in forty and got away. His assailants of yesterday were probably included among the party in the station.

The engine having drunk its fill, on we went again, toiling painfully up through gorges in which the semi-tropical banana and bamboo had long since given place to hardier rhododendron and fire-plant, achieving at length a brick-red plateau. Gaunt red peaks, like stacks of burnt-out clinker, hemmed the plateau, and scattered about in the yellow grass were black rocks that looked like resting animals. At every moment one



expected them to arise, turning themselves into buffaloes, and stroll away.

Halting at a small, noisy town I got two fellow-passengers, mother and child, an elegant pair. The lady wore a violet jacket and black trousers, she had heavy silver bangles on her arms, and her sleek head was banded with black cloth studded with silver images. My lord the baby wore a quilted coat, a cap that was decorated with a demon's mask and points that stood up like rabbit-ears. He behaved with perfect composure, sitting quietly in his place, sucking a piece of sugar-cane and regarding that queer creature, myself, with bright, interested eyes.

At sunset we were rattling down the Gorge of the Black Dragon to the plateau of Mong T'zu. I spent the night in the walled village of A-mi-Chu in a hostelry kept by a Greek and his Japanese wife, its solitary guest.

We left next morning in style. A wedding-party took the train, also a war-lord. A squad of dishevelled warriors came to wish the latter godspeed, presenting arms, mostly upside down. The hymeneal group consisted of the bride, her mother-in-law and several males. The men were cheerful enough, but the two women sat in stiff silence, their faces muffled from the vulgar gaze. Wraps despite, I caught glimpses of both and though I can understand the old lady's objection to being seen, the same did not apply to the bride, who was a comely little thing and looked very smart in her jacket of quilted scarlet. The party got out at the next stop amid a tremendous explosion of fireworks and were borne off in procession, led by tatterdemalion minstrels playing on pipes and gongs. The bride's palanquin was hung with embroidered curtains and on its roof were a score of fantastic little dolls mounted



on wires so that they danced and quivered at every step. The rest followed in litters of diminishing splendour till there was nothing left for the bride's youngest brother but a piece of sacking tacked to a couple of saplings. I should have thought he would have been vastly more comfortable on his legs, but he appeared to consider any form of transport better than



Some aspects of a War-Lord (and a Homburg hat)

none and was carried off, nothing but his feet and head showing, his neck nipped firmly between the poles. In contrast to the gay flags and palanquins were the porters that bore them, as foul and ragged a crew of poor devils as ever I did see. Their patched and faded blue garments hung in tatters and wherever the dirty flesh showed there also was an unwashed sore.

A short run across a plateau where magpies flut-



tered and blue cranes paddled in the paddy-fields seeking the early worm, and we were among the hills again, following the cañon-bed of the Pa-ta-ho, once more squirming and wriggling upwards, ever upwards. On the mountain slopes wild azaleas flourished, sweet briar, camellias and stunted pine. The beehive kilns of charcoal burners smoked right up to the clouds. Their camps could be seen lodged in any crack or crevice large enough to provide lying-space. Parties of woodcutters, men and women, bent under appalling loads, threaded their way down the precipitous scarps by paths that would baffle a goat. All day long this continued, snatches of cultivated plateaux, then more barren hills and gorges.

All day long the war-lord sat opposite me and slept. He was a fat, morose young man in civilian kit, olive-coloured robe with a black silk jacket. On his fat cropped head he wore a Homburg hat which was too small for him. For twelve long hours he never opened his mouth, except to eat one small orange. He spoke not, smoked not, drank not, and—marvellous to relate—spat not. He just slept and slept, either sitting or lying, in the latter position presenting to me a plump olive-coloured rump, which I itched to spank, shifting the inadequate hat from ear to nose as the situation required.

By late afternoon we had climbed into a country of bare red mountains and blue-green lakes, six thousand five hundred feet above sea-level and slid downwards to the fertile plain of Yunnan-Fu to see the sun westering in frosty splendour behind the many belted towers.

Yunnan means "South of the clouds." Yunnun-Fu (the City of Yunnan) was known to Marco Polo (1254-1324) as "Yachi." He calls it "a very great and noble city in which are numerous merchants and



craftsmen. The people are of sundry kinds, for there are not only Saracens (Mahometans) and Idolaters, but also a few Nestorian Christians. . . . They have brine wells in this country from which they make salt. . . . They reckon it no matter for a man to have intimacy with another's wife, provided the woman be willing. Let me tell you also that the people of that country eat their meat raw, whether it be of mutton, beef, buffalo, poultry or any other kind. . . . And you must know that the people dock two or three joints off the tail of their horses, to prevent them flipping their riders, a thing which they consider very unseemly." * He adds that they used cowrie shells for currency. Rashiduddin, a Persian statesman of the same period, supports the Venetian. Says he: "Thence you arrive at the borders of Tibet, where they eat raw meat, worship images, and have no shame respecting their wives."

Yunnan has changed but little. Mahometans are still numerous, despite a stout effort in 1860 on the part of the Manchus to exterminate them. A great trade is still carried on in salt from the brine wells. The craftsmen of whom Polo spoke have lost none of their skill, but whether raw-meaters and cuckolds are as plentiful as formerly I cannot say. My opinion is that the Yunnan Benedick's complaisance sprang from absence of danger. Speaking from an experience of many lands, savage and civilised, I have never seen such a hideous set of women as Yunnan produces. In addition to their natural shapelessness one woman in four is afflicted with goitre. Were I married to a Yunnan lady she might stop out all night with a truck-load of Don Juans and Lotharios and I would not worry.

* Yule's translation.



Tower of victory. Yunnan-Fu.



A wall built by the Ming emperors encircles the city. It is more than five kilometres in circumference, and is flanked by thirteen towers and pierced by six gates. Time and negligence have played havoc with the towers and walls; but Yunnan-Fu has little need of man-made defences, for round about stand steadfast and tenable ranges through which wind the caravan routes, southwest and northwest to Burmah and Tibet; north, by the gorges of the Yang-tse, to Sze-chuan. Outside the city rear two imposing towers. The taller is one hundred and fifty feet high and has eleven outside galleries. One Ts'en, a viceroy, built it in anticipation of triumphs over the French. That he took the hiding of his career and returned to Yunnan *ventre à terre* did not persuade him to change its name, and "Tower of Victory" it remains to this day. The Chinese are an undefeatable race.

The surrounding wall of mountains, combined with its distance from the sea or any main artery, has preserved the old life of China in Yunnan-Fu. The women, even of the coolie class, totter painfully along on deformed "lily feet." The ubiquitous Ford has not penetrated thus far as yet, and notables travel in swaying chairs borne by porters. Man-power costs little, life nothing at all. The people breed like guinea-pigs and die like flies. Except for the pathetic front put up by a handful of devoted "foreign devils," disease ramps unchecked. Forty thousand people died of diphtheria in a single month, so a medical missionary told me, adding that perhaps it was as well, as there had been a crop failure that year and they would have died anyhow, and more painfully. In bitter weather a score or so of beggars and poor folk freeze to death in the streets every night. They hardly trouble to remove the bodies. One morning I saw two inanimate



bundles of rags lying out in the open, one dragged across a muck-heap, the other lying face down in the gutter. Nobody took the slightest notice. The crowd joked and shouted and pushed on its way without a glance. About noon some municipal scavengers wandered up and took one body off in an ox-cart—along with the other rubbish. I don't know who disposed of the corpse on the muck-heap; it was still there at sundown, caked in flies.

On another occasion I strolled into murder in full swing. It was in a packed alley close to the Double Gates. I had had an excellent lunch and was wending my way homewards in a state of full-blown contentment, laved in cheerful sunshine. All of a sudden the crowd swirled excitedly, there was a brisk scrimmage, a scream, people stampeding hither and thither, and there before me were two men writhing on the ground and a third crumpling up against a shop-front, all slit like pigs. The shop was a potter's, exhibiting green-glazed earthenware. Out of a jar, in which it had taken refuge, popped a tame squirrel. It hopped to the length of its chain and, balancing on a pot lid, peered interestedly down upon the squirming men below. There we were, three dying men, myself and the squirrel. Murderers, every one else, had vanished.

It took me some seconds to realise what had transpired. Half-past two of a sunny afternoon seemed such an improper time for a job of that sort. Murders by the best authors invariably occur in lonely spots at the dead of night, not in a crowded street, just after lunch, a particularly good lunch. It didn't seem appropriate or real. However, the three poor chaps writhing their souls out in the mud were real enough. Time, place, everything despite, it was murder all right. That, to my experience, is Life all over. It



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



has no theatrical *flair*, no sense of fitness. It has the world for stage and all humanity for players, and bungles every scene. The dramatist places his murder in the Haunted Grange; Life in a sunny thoroughfare. Had Life been given the handling of them, Romeo and Juliet would have poured their hearts out, not on a rose-hung balcony, but a sewage farm. Bah!

The victims of this affair, I learned, were Cantonese merchants. The murderers were suspected to be soldiers and, as far as I know, got clean away with a comfortable lump of money to reward them for their enterprise. Nobody worried. Three men less meant a trifle more room for others. China with its four hundred millions, is grossly overburdened, somebody has got to go. It was, I think, the late Li-Hung-Chang who refused to countenance a European scheme for banking the Hoang-Ho, on the score that the river's frequent floods periodically eased the population problems of his country. And Li-Hung-Chang had the reputation of being a very wise old Chink.

The streets of Yunnan-Fu are narrow, filthy, stinking, swarming and breakneck—whole paving-blocks being absent here and there, leaving pits a foot deep. Nevertheless traffic hums and hustles through these cramped and tortuous alleys from dawn to dark. Porters sidle along carrying bales of hides or great white chunks of salt that look like marble. Here comes a notable borne high in a chair by shouting coolies. There go the gay palanquins of a wedding-party. From one direction comes a chain of wooden ox-wagons, ungreased axles piercingly a-shriek; from another a string of shaggy little pack-ponies come in from Tibet or the Shan States, perhaps, months on the road. Now it is a gang of loaded convicts, their leg-irons jingling musically. Here are rich men in black silk, smoke-grey or



TO YUNNAN-FU



royal blue. There sturdy peasant women in coarse red jackets, coolies and beggar-folk in rag patchworks. Here are hawkers of sweetmeats and sugar-cane, *restauranters* carrying their smoking, odoriferous establishments along with them, slung on poles. Here are



Yunnanese.

workers in the silver for which the mines of Yunnan have been famed for centuries; workers in the veined Ta-li marble, in green jade and white, enamel and kingfisher plumes. There are stores displaying the lustrous silks of Sze-chuan and Tientuan. Here furriers' shops



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



hung with bunches of leopard-skins, wolf, panther, red Yunnan fox, Siberian squirrel, sable, wildcat and pheasant. There Butcher's Row where sides of black buffalo meat swing beside grinning dogs—these latter a great delicacy. Here shops of funeral stuff, paper junks, horses, palanquins and substantial coffins made of valuable yellow samou wood. There, beneath a canopy of coloured paper evergreens and artificial flowers, sits a beggar playing on a pipe, while his brat lustily crashes cymbals; there is a wedding within.

On every door are pasted pictures of two ferocious warriors, brandishing weapons and grimacing horribly, the genii Guardians of the House. The city abounds in pagodas, but they are shabby affairs, their names are the best part of them—Temple of Great Virtue, of the Bull of Springtime, the Jade Dragon, the Dragon King, Heart of the Sea, Five Flowers and Literary Culture. The most interesting—the Copper Pagoda and Si-chan—lie some miles outside the walls. I rode out to the former on an energetic but wooden-headed little stallion who, despite my well-meant efforts to pick the best of the road, persisted in the stoniest and most slippery places. I took it that he was one of the Young China party, sworn against any form of foreign interference, no matter how beneficial, and let him have his head—nor, I must confess, did he put a foot wrong, though I have had more comfortable rides.

The track ran for miles along the top of dykes raised above the paddy-fields. I passed strings of pack-animals and parties of coolies staggering into town under loads of hides and charcoal, cut through a couple of hamlets full of children and saddle-back pigs and climbed the slopes of a bare range, threading my way round gaping fissures, fifty feet deep and raw as wounds. It was as though some almighty power had



grasped the hills in its hands and rent them asunder.

The temple lay in the depths of a still wood of pine and beech. Two tall demons guarded the outer gate, the one, battle-axe in hand, the other fanged like a wild boar, and immediately inside the gate was a third, a golden fiend with a flaming beard, brandishing a club. Beyond were two courts, tree-grown and flanked by sheds containing forty-eight man-sized genii. Most of them were terrible creatures, claw-footed, bat-winged, tiger-fanged, hurling thunderbolts and hammers. Some had eyes in the centre of their foreheads and mouths gaping in their distended bellies, but others again were friendly folk, placid sages of old China holding a book or a flower. There was a queen with a gilded face, dandling a child, not unlike an Italian Madonna, and a nice old gentleman with a white beard, petting a spotted stag. All these vividly painted images were made of nothing but common mud, plastered over a cane framework.

There was not a living thing in sight but the little green squirrels peering from the tree-tops; not a sound to be heard but the wind sighing through the beeches. Winter leaves blew hither and thither across the deserted courts, heaping in gold-brown drifts at the feet of god and demon.

The pagoda itself stands on a white marble base at the top of a flight of steps. It was erected towards the close of the great Ming dynasty (about the beginning of the fifteenth century) and is a small pavilion built of richly chiselled copper throughout—doors, walls and roof. With its perfect proportions and the delicate and fanciful filigree carvings with which it is fretted from eaves to base, it looks like a giant jewel casket, the masterpiece of an Oriental Cellini. Typical of China, the guardian priest had hung his week's



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



washing out to dry on the marble balustrade! This same worthy issued from his lodge and let me into the pagoda, smoking his pipe unabashed before the sacred Tsu-chu. Suddenly a shrill, exultant cackle pierced the quiet. The priest cocked his ears and with a hasty apologetic bow to me disappeared. His hen had done the daily job; he was off to gather the fruit.

Close beside the Copper Pagoda is a terrace with an interesting modern monument. Not many years ago there was an officer in the Yunnan forces who was blessed with a wife of surpassing beauty. A certain governor cast desirous eyes upon her, but, being an honourable man, the simple and popular course of having his underling surreptitiously stabbed or strangled was unthinkable. There happened to be a war on, so he sent the officer up to the front with a note to the general saying that Mr. So-and-So was a promising young man, marked out for promotion, and would the general see to it that he got every chance of distinguishing himself. The officer got every chance; too many, in fact. In the words of my pony boy, a linguist, "enemy him sting him." The governor, always the perfect gentleman, consoled the widow in the most practical manner open to him and erected this costly monument to the deceased, setting forth, in letters of gold, his many virtues, and regret at his untimely demise—a pretty touch. All of which, of course, is the story of David and Bathsheba and proves what the heathen may learn from a careful study of Christian literature.

The trip to Si-Chan consumed the whole day. Half an hour's ride, three hours on the "Grass Sea" in a sailing sampan, a mile walk and then a climb up the mountain of the Green Jade Chicken through woods of fir, beech and ancient oak. I lunched in a temple some twelve hundred feet above the lake, drinking green tea



TO YUNNAN-FU



brewed by the priests, presided over by four great scowling images of painted mud. The plateau of Yunnan-Fu lay spread like a map beneath, hamlets, farms, glinting rivers and ricefields, all lit with clear winter sunshine. Opposite reared the Mountain of the Golden Horse. Far away to the north was the city itself, with its brown walls and red-tiled roofs, and to the northwest another mountain striped with great bars of red and black—the head of a dragon, they say, that has its tail in Sze-Chuan.

Below shone the Tien Lake, green and red, green with the submarine grasses from which it gets its name, red where the inundated lands showed through. Tien Lake, of course, had its dragon, too, once upon a time. According to legend, dragons of every colour must have been as thick as wasps in the good old days. There is hardly a nook or a corner in Yunnan that isn't dedicated to the unblest memory of some once-resident monster. An enthusiastic scalp-hunter like our St. George could have got all the exercise he needed within a stone's throw of his hotel.

According to legend, the Tien Lake Dragon was endowed with the power of turning itself into a beautiful maiden. In this guise it would perambulate the beach luring susceptible (and tender) youths to destruction. However, in one Tchao-Kia-lo, a tough old hermit, she bit off more than she could chew. Impervious to her pretty tricks, he swiped her head off and was rewarded with the patron sainthood of the district.

Lunch finished, I lit a pipe and strolled along the dizzy gallery with a sheer drop of seven hundred feet over the railing. The gallery terminated in a small grotto chiselled out of the live rock. A party of young Chinese gentlemen were picnicking in this airy niche, enlivening the repast with volleys of firecrackers and



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



tunes on a four-foot zither. They were courtesy itself, springing up and inviting me to join their feast. I thanked them as best I could, explaining by signs that I had already lunched. One favour I did beg of them, however. The grotto was dedicated to the God of Literature, a sprightly golden person dancing on the head of a winged dragon against a background of painted monkeys, cranes and lotus flowers. The Spirit of Literature and I had nothing to offer him! One of the picnickers had a packet of joss-sticks. I begged a few of him. He pressed the whole packet on me, but I took four only, stuck them in a pot, set light to them, and taking off my hat bowed low to the golden dancer. I trust he'll remember me some day.

CHAPTER XIII

TO HUÉ

I returned from Yunnan to Hanoi by the way I went, which was the only way, and was joined at Loakai by three Germans of the Foreign Legion who were being sent down to the hospital. Malaria had got the lot of us and we spent an everlasting day stretched out on the seats, alternately burning and shaking. What conversation I had with the corporal, between dithers, revealed that we had both been engaged in and around St. Julien in the Ypres affair of July 31, 1917. The spectacle of the corporal and myself, who but a few years before had striven might and main to kill each other, picking one another up off the rails and wobbling drunkenly down the long Hanoi platform locked in the embrace of mutual support, cannot have been without its humour.

Recovering, I headed south for Hué, to attend the funeral of the late Khai-Dinh, Emperor of Annam. The first stage was by rail and was not interesting, flat mile after flat mile of the same old paddy, studded with limestone hills that start out of the plain with the abruptness of African kopjes. Seeing that there was no reason to keep awake, I fell back on my unfailing antidote for boredom. When I woke up, four hours later, there was another passenger in the compartment. A robust, elderly Frenchman with a virile white moustache brushing the tip of his hooked nose and a pair of keen, blue eyes twinkling humorously under shaggy brows. He complimented me on my sleeping powers,



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



told me a story which he had just heard and thought too good to keep, and was affability itself. Thereupon we struck up a friendship which lasted for weeks and was all to my advantage. His name was Valoir, a full-blooded, Rabelaisian, learned old boy. I took him for a retired soldier, but in point of fact he was an archæologist of distinction, possessing that gift, peculiar to the French savant, of poking his head among other worlds without losing his firm foothold on this.

Time passed quickly. We rumbled over the border, unheeding, and I, who had travelled half-way round the world to visit Annam, did not realize, until some time later, that I had reached it. I don't know what I could have done even if I had known. Still, I might have taken off my hat, or waved my hand—some small graceful gesture.

At noon the train halted and, Valoir having disappeared in search of old friends, I lunched alone in the station-house. We set forth again with ceremony. A party of Annamite officials, each with a tablet pinned to his breast setting forth his degree of learning, filed on to the platform and were reviewed by an old gentleman in a dirty white turban and a disgraceful pair of trousers. Of the cheapest white calico were they, smudged and smutted, and frayed all round the bottom. Despite his lamentable trews he appeared to be a person of consequence, for all the neat young men displayed the utmost deference. The engine loosed a valedictory toot, the great man boarded the train, the station staff removing their caps, the officials crossing their hands over their black sateen stomachs and bobbing like a row of mechanical dolls.

Off we went. The landscape being still unworthy of notice, I was once more preparing myself for slumber when who should enter unto me but the great man him-

self. He bowed, I bowed. He beamed, I grinned. He advanced a thin, delicate hand and we shook. Then, folding his disgraceful trousers up under him, he sank down in the opposite corner and subjected me to keen, somewhat amused, scrutiny. Five long white hairs, stiff as wire, depended goat-fashion from his chin, an equal number of the same kind trailed from either extremity of his lip. On his breast hung an ivory plaque inlaid with gold. But those pants! It was on the tip of my tongue to say, "My dear sir, I'm afraid you've been sitting where you shouldn't. Come into the lavatory and let me wash 'em for you." But I refrained.

Presently he began to question me in hesitant French. Who was I? What was I doing in Annam? Where had I come from? Where was I going? How long was I stopping? He even asked my age. In a European it would have been impertinent and I should probably have boxed his ears (always provided he was of boxable size), but in this yellow gentleman it was the frank curiosity of a child. I satisfied him on every point. He was greatly interested. Britishers were not common in Annam; he had never spoken to one before. He had heard there was one in Tourane, a solitary specimen. Had I ever been in France? Paris? He had visited Paris in 1907. A beautiful town! What was that place he had admired so much? I hazarded Versailles, the Tuileries, the Louvre, Napoleon's Tomb, the Bois, the Luxembourg, Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower—all the time-honoured star turns. He spurned them all.

"No, no! Red lights going round and round and ladies dancing in little clothing."

"The *Moulin Rouge*?" I suggested



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



His face lit up. "Ah, yes, the *Moulin Rouge*! Beautiful! Beautiful!"

He smoked two of my cigarettes, glowing with beautiful memories of Montmartre and returned to his *entourage*, shaking hands again on parting. He had caught this disease very badly from the French, who have made an elaborate ritual of it. A Frenchman comes into a café, sees a circle of friends, shakes hands solemnly with every one, wallowing on the outermost to get at the innermost, says a few words, goes through the whole tedious business again and takes his departure. I watched two French officers outside the Glacis in Fez one evening. They shook hands no less than five times. They were not parting forever. They were meeting again in two hours' time to dine with me. Handshaking originated in the middle ages, a period when all the best people went armed like porcupines and empty right hand smiting empty right hand was a sign of trust that had some meaning in it. However, those times are gone, the Borgias and Can Grandes are dust (thank God!) and I consider it unnecessary that I should demonstrate more than once in a single meeting that I am not carrying any stilettos up my sleeve that morning.

Valoir had not missed the train, as I thought. He strolled in presently, having been chatting with more old native friends in the third class. I told him of my visitor and learned that he was a great man indeed, governor of a province and one of the five chief mandarins of the empire. I said that in that case I thought the empire might dash him a clean pair of trousers. Valoir was very amused and explained that their unloveliness was a sign of grief for the king. In Palestine, when bereaved, one heaped ashes upon the head.



In Annam one rubbed them into the pants—"Said it with trousers," so to speak.

In a quarter of an hour His Excellency was back again for more cigarettes, shaking hands with me as though we had not met for years. He was in and out at half-hour intervals all the way to Vinh, smoking my cigarettes, shaking hands and enlarging on his beautiful *Moulin Rouge*—the one thing in the fair and historic land of France that appeared to have made a lasting impression on him. I imagine that His Excellency's private dream of heaven is founded on that resort, red lights going round and round and ladies skipping . . . well, it might be worse.

We reached Vinh at nightfall. I went to bed at ten and was roused a few minutes later (or so it seemed) by Valoir struggling like a netted tarpon in the folds of my mosquito-bar. He had come to wake me, he said. It was 3:30 A.M. There was but half an hour to shave, dress, breakfast and catch the bus. I stumbled out into the pouring darkness, climbed into a seat and fell asleep again, Valoir snoring beside me, grizzled head on my shoulder.

We woke to find the bus at rest on the shore of a river. Lights blinked across the water, sampans jostled together along the bank, sleepy ferrymen in palm-leaf raincoats were adjusting gangplanks. An uproar of horns and voices and a second motor surged alongside. A flap was lifted and I beheld the smiling countenance and wiry chin-hairs of His Excellency the Governor. He waved to us cheerily, tried to shake hands, when a spout of water from the uplifted flap emptied over his turban and the head was hastily withdrawn. The bus lumbered aboard the ferry, the men took up their curious paddles and we were slowly sculled across the wide Song-Ca.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



I fell asleep again, to awake to a grey and cheerless dawn. All along the roadsides were burdened people, men, women and children, toiling into market. It is a marvel that their slender bodies will support the tremendous loads inflicted upon them. The Tonkinese and Annamites are lauded for their industry, but it is the brainless industry of the ant. They have excellent roads and the uses of the wheel have been apparent to the Chinese barrow-coolie for centuries. Yet it has not penetrated the Indo-Chinese skull that by means of a wheel the load might be transported with half the exertion, or doubled with the same. There is nothing dignified or admirable in unnecessary labour.

But if I place the intelligence of the Annamite coolie at a low level, let me make amends by extolling that of his dog. At a conservative estimate I motored a thousand miles in Indo-China and passed five hundred dogs. The cars were mostly public conveyances driven at crazy speed by carefree native drivers who regarded no road rules and respected nobody. In Europe our trail would have been strewn with the legs, tails and corpses of well-bred morons who wait until they hear the sound of a horn and then meander in a dazed fashion into the centre of the road, sit down and scratch. In Indo-China of all the five hundred nondescripts passed we harmed not, nay nor even endangered the least last tail-hair of one of them—the dogs saw to that. A small dot of a dog would be sighted far away, progressing thoughtfully to his place of business. He would turn, sum up the situation at a glance, remove himself unhurriedly into the grass, sit down behind a bush, wait till we had thundered by, and quietly resume his journey. Cool, sensible little fellows, I salute you!

Our overloaded conveyance rocked and roared south-



wards, bumping, skidding, plunging in and out of ruts, throwing up waves of mud. Rain and wind slashed and tore at the side-cloths. Here and there were little farms with their bamboo thickets and slim areca palms; and at intervals, set under clumps of trees, were small pagodas fronted by masonry screens decorated with dragons, tigers and horsemen in painted bas-relief. Semi-cultivated land gave place to desolate heaths. A range of blue-black mountains was squeez-



The Mandarin Passes.

ing in on our right, throwing a beetling spur from west to east across our path.

Valoir opened his eyes, shook himself like a spaniel coming out of water, and was awake. We were on the old Mandarin Road, he informed me, built by the Chinese invaders in the third century. It ran the length of the land and got its name from the ambassadors who rode north to pay tribute to the "Son of Heaven," bridles of straw upon their ponies as a token of humility. Valoir had ridden to Hué in a palanquin thirty years before. There were, naturally, no motor lorries then, no regular coast steamers. Everything and



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



everybody went north and south by the Mandarin Road—it swarmed like an ant-trek: mile-long strings of porters, soldiers, post-riders, beggars, great people in palanquins with guards and umbrella-men. There were military posts every few miles and rest-houses where one could get coolies, ponies, food and fully furnished beds—every home comfort. The journey took time, but it was full of interest and animation. Precarious days, the old days—he had dodged murder by a hair's-breadth time and again; the natives did not always appreciate the archæological spirit, his specialty being the opening of tombs—but full days and rich.

He pointed south to the frowning barrier. Up there was a wall running from the main range to the sea, and pierced by a single gate, the Annam Gate. Everything had to go through that gate, once upon a time. The wall was built by the Tonkinese to keep the Annamites in bounds. Down south, at the Pass of the Clouds, was another wall built by the Annamites to restrain the Chams. Annam was merely a thin strip of coastline, squeezed in between the Annamite Range and the China Sea, eight hundred miles long, with an average breadth of seventy-seven. A poor land and narrow, likened by the natives to the *ganh*, or carrying-pole, bearing at either end the rich rice-bags of Tonking and Cochin-China. He pointed to the cloudy wall of mountains. That was the Annamite Chain, the western boundary. In a moment we would see the eastern as well, the sea. He knew of no other country where two opposite boundaries were visible at once.

The road took a swerve, came a crash on our ears as of heavy artillery, and there, as Valoir promised, was the China Sea, monsoon hounded, its tawny breakers tearing up the sand as though to devour it, clots of yellow foam whirling on the gale. The road swerved



again and there was the barrier range lowering overhead with the defensible wall riding its crest like a cockscomb and a single black arch silhouetted against the scurrying rain-clouds—the Gate of Annam. The Route Coloniale showed against the dark hillside like a Gargantuan snake fighting its way to the summit by violent convolutions, but the old Mandarin Road went straight up in a series of paved steps, a Jacob's Ladder, reaching to the clouds, crowded with people ascending and descending.

At noon we halted in a little walled town close to the ever-present sea and I lunched in a government bungalow, beside a moat filled with cress and lotus. Valoir saw the bus off. He would catch me up, he said. He was remaining in Dong-Hoi for one night only, to visit a dear friend of his, a missionary. Judging by Valoir's appearance when he showed up in Hué next day he and his missionary must have made a long night of it—doubtless discussing knotty theological problems.

By afternoon the sun had got the upper hand and the heat was intense. I have a drowsy recollection of crossing innumerable ferries and rocking and roaring for hours down dusty white roads bordered with bamboos, the driver playing a continuous fortissimo obbligato on the klaxon. To the west were ragged blue mountains; to the east sand-dunes like snow hills, blinding white, with glimpses between of hyacinth sea striped with translucent bottle-green breakers and flashes of raving foam.

The bus was licensed for six first-class passengers and sixteen second. We started with five of the former and twenty-two of the latter, discarded nobody and picked up every suppliant. Besides the passengers was their luggage, and this did not mean a modest hand-bag apiece. It meant sleeping-mats, boxes, sacks, bales,



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



furniture, crates of merchandise and poultry. In addition we carried a live pig and a bicycle, the latter hung outboard over the side like a life-boat in a steamer's davits. The second-class sufferers sat on each other, on the floor, on the piled-up luggage. The overflow mounted the already overburdened roof. One youth rode all day clinging to the running-boards, another to the step. How the topheavy vehicle contrived to keep its feet when hurtling round corners at top speed was nothing short of miraculous.

Valoir's place beside me was taken by a native beauty in a dress of cream-colored silk, a vivacious soul. She tried to open a conversation with me, but finding I was ignorant of her tongue transferred to the driver. Spirited badinage was exchanged which set all the second-class a-titter. Having smoked a cigarette, she produced a silver box, split and pared an areca nut, smeared it with lime, selected a bit of red bark, wrapped the whole up in a betel-leaf and put it in her mouth. Her mouth was never idle. When not smoking she was talking, when not talking chewing, when not chewing spitting, each time clambering over me to get at the side.

We passed out of cultivated country into desolate heaths again and climbing a hill beheld a strange procession racing along the sky-line to cut us off. It consisted of an Annamite and three French priests, skirts and umbrellas tucked up under their arms, mighty beards streaming in the breeze, galloping like colts, whooping like Cherokees. The native convert, being young and slender, reached the road first and executed a sort of war-dance in front of the oncoming bus. It stopped. The three missionaries arrived panting brokenly, sponging their foreheads. One was evidently fresh to the job. He was young, wore a cassock, and



his beard was a mere tuft of struggling fluff, but the other two were old stagers, wearing native dress and beards of true tropical exuberance.

The bus by this time contained seven first-class passengers and thirty second. It was unthinkable that it would take in any more. But the driver never hesitated. The convert went up to join the throng (and the pig) on the roof. With a modesty commensurate with his beard, the young priest relegated himself to the second-class and the two elders hove their vast carcasses in on top of us. On top of us literally. With a sunny smile, but without any warning or by your leave, the vaster of the pair sank ponderously and devastatingly upon my knees, apparently prepared to stop there all the way to Quang-Tri. I am a middle-weight; he weighed two hundred and twenty pounds if an ounce. He squashed me flat, overflowed me in every direction, suffocated and obliterated me. I tried to buck him off—I doubt if he felt me stir. I shouted at him—the general uproar drowned my voice. I would have thumped him on his great spreading back, but my hands were pinned to my sides by the crush on the seat. I realized that if I did not do something speedily there would be little to choose between myself and a Dover sole at journey's end—so I did the only thing in my power. My oppressor jerked up off my knees as though electrified, uttering an expression not usually associated with his cloth.

"Sit on me again and I'll do it again," I warned.

"But would you have me stand all the way?" he growled, tenderly rubbing his expansive butt-end.

"Not at all," said I. "You shall sit—but I will sit on *you*."

Very comfortable sitting he made, let me say. Seldom have I sat on anything more yielding, more lux-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



uriously cushioned. I fairly wallowed on him. We got quite friendly as time wore on. He smoked my cigarettes and laughed uproariously at Valoir's naughty stories which I repeated for his delectation, at intervals hoisting his voluminous white trousers to scratch a hairy sockless shin. The Annamite beauty, taking a leaf from my book, sat herself on the lap of the other priest. Thus, chattering like apes, packed to overflowing, legs dangling from the roof, heads sticking out everywhere, horn in full blast, pig in full song, we rocked and roared on toward Hué, to bury the king.

CHAPTER XIV

HUÉ

Hué is the capital of Annam, a kingdom of comparatively recent formation. The Chinese invaded the country at the end of the third century and held it until the tenth. For the next four hundred years it filled the rôle so unselfishly occupied in Europe by Belgium, namely, of providing areas for larger nations to devastate, and was continuously fought over by the northern Tonkinese and the southern Chams. In 1428 a native dynasty was established, but the kings ruled only by kind permission of the Trinh family of Tonking and the Nguyens of Cochinchina, much as the marionette Mikados danced on the strings of the great Shoguns.

Chapman—an emissary of the Honourable East India Company, sent by Warren Hastings—visited the country while one of these inter-family squabbles was raging and says that the people were reduced to eating seaweed, and human flesh was exposed for sale in Hué markets. Chapman had a narrow escape from being turned into “chow” himself. His tiny bark was fired on by the shore batteries, but despite a violent north-east monsoon, he managed to fight his way out to sea.

This state of affairs continued until the end of the eighteenth century, when the Trinh family got the upper hand and the representative Nguyen was forced into precipitate retirement. But not for long. Help was at hand. Meet Monseigneur George Peter Joseph Pigneau de Behaine, Bishop of Adran, of the order of Franciscans, born in Laon, France. He was a bold,



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



able man, more soldier than priest. There is a portrait of him in Hué, a clean-shorn, astute, masterful face of a type common among Spanish prelates of the middle ages (see the portraits in the Sala Capitular of Toledo Cathedral) who would cheerfully lead an army or a government, falling back on jobs of church-work only when there was nothing else doing. Behaine found Gia-long moping in retirement and, seeing a chance for the advancement of his native land, made a friend of him. That done, he returned to France taking with him Gia-long's son, the young Prince Canh, and pitched the yarn to Louis XVI.

A strange, pathetic figure he must have made at Versailles, that forlorn little yellow thing, being dragged through brilliant salons and kaleidoscopic throngs by the grim, ambitious bishop. Louis was so moved by Gia-long's tale of woe that he signed a treaty in 1787 by which Gia-long resigned the island of Poulo Condore (a strategic base) and the port of Tourane (the only decent harbour in Annam proper) to France *forever* and Louis in return sent—his very best wishes. Behaine, however, by his own efforts, managed to land a couple of shiploads of arms and, with the assistance of a handful of European adventurers, kicked the Trinh's headlong and established Nguyens in Hué, where they reign (theoretically) to this day. Behaine died in Saigon and is buried outside the city in a fine tomb in Annamite style surrounded by masonry screens, on one of which is a bas-relief dragon flying through the air, with a book—presumably the Bible—and a sword strapped to its back. Gia-long attended the funeral and himself delivered the oration. A hundred elephants were also present, but what they did I do not know.

Though Gia-long displayed genuine gratitude to the



man who had made him master of Annam, Cambodia and Tonking, he had few other qualities. To the faithful Europeans in his employ who ventured to point out that encouragement of industry would lead to the betterment of the poor, he replied that he preferred them poor. Did any one displease him, he cast not only the offender but his entire family, old men and women, babies born and unborn, under his elephants to be trodden to pulp.

The Revolution and the Napoleonic adventure kept France too busy at home to attend to Annam. Several English and a few American ships visited the country and tried to open trade, but met with no encouragement and scant courtesy. They all describe the kingdom as being held under the most brutal despotism. The people were little better than slaves. The government claimed the services of every male adult in the land. Women were sold like cattle and were of exactly the same value, head for head. The average price paid for one healthy young buffalo was one healthy young girl, and *vice versa*. The king chopped heads off as he liked and flogging was the national pastime. It was the bamboo's golden age. Masters bamboosed their servants, officers the non-commissioned officers, non-commissioned officers their men. Husbands bamboosed their wives, wives their children, and children, I presume, passed it on to the dogs and cats. Crawford (1821), entering a mandarin's house in Hué—to be regaled on a dish of *hatched* eggs—found a company of actors being bamboosed for a bad performance. The hero of the piece, anything but heroic at the moment, was upended on the ground in full costume, squalling at the top of his lungs. Drastic, perhaps, but a little of that medicine would do wonders for the English stage.



Isidore Hedde, who visited the country with the French mission in 1844, writes: "The King has taken to himself the entire monopoly of trade. He buys from his subjects at the price he himself appoints and sends his ships to sell the goods, on his own account, at foreign ports. . . . To give an idea of the manner in which this trade is carried on we may mention that, in 1843, the King sent to Canton two of his ships and twelve officers to sell his goods and buy others. On their return, not being satisfied with their success, he degraded the officers and put them in prison in fetters, and confiscated all their property. They are still there, bewailing their miserable condition. . . ."

The articles he exported were, among other things, silk, tea, cinnamon, rhinoceros-horns, eagle-wood (used by the Chinese as incense, and also medicine credited with many marvellous virtues), ivory and birds' nests. In return he received firearms, opium, tin, red, blue and yellow cloth.

But times were to change. The seed sown by Pigneau de Behaine was shortly to germinate. France, routed out of India, turned her eyes further east and dug out the old treaty. There was that fine harbour of Tourane ceded to her by Gia-long for all eternity—that was something to start on, a foothold. Taking the ill treatment of some missionaries (a body who though neglected in life may in death find themselves of supreme national regard) as an excuse, she started work in earnest.

Tourane was taken in 1858. Admiral Rigault de Genouilly stormed Saigon in the next spring and was immediately blockaded in it by the Annamite Nguyen Tri-Phuong with twenty thousand men. Nevertheless, by the end of 1861 all Cochin-China was in French hands and two years later Cambodia followed suit. In



1885 Hué itself was occupied by a mixed force of Zouaves, Marine Infantry and Chasseurs, 1,387 men in all, supported by two small gunboats.

On the night of July 4th General de Courcy, flushed with easy triumph, gave a gala banquet. It seems to have been a convivial evening. About ten P. M. a lieutenant sent in to say that the natives were moving in a suspicious way. The General, "*plein de gaiété*," threatened him with eight days C.B. for alarmist reports and continued to organize his forthcoming review. At eleven the party broke up and the merrymakers sought their scattered quarters. All was quiet. All was quiet until one A. M., when hell ripped open. Two or three cannon boomed from the citadel, the sky lit up with a red glow and simultaneously the camps were rushed by a horde of armed convicts turned loose by the regent, Thuyet. The French, separated, taken completely by surprise, turned out in their night-shirts and fought for dear life, lit by the flaming barricades, blazed into by the royal artillery, charged by the royal troops—and even elephants.

The king, Ham Nghi, woke up in his palace a little before cock-crow and asked how the massacre was going. Thuyet replied that only a few isolated French were left and they doomed, adding that he would spare one only—to tell the tale. Nevertheless, while the king and the old queen-mothers were in the midst of breakfast, they were snatched up and hustled by a back way into the country. The French, so far from being dead, were very much alive and were even then storming at the gates. When they broke into the palace they found a massive gold plate containing the remains of the royal breakfast.

Twenty-three killed and sixty-four wounded was the price the French paid for General de Courcy's gala



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



dinner. As for the Annamites, "Fifteen hundred corpses litter the ground," the General reported, in his ebullient style. Had he been wiser he would have cleared up the litter. The unburied corpses, decomposing in the sun, set up a plague of cholera to which seven hundred of his own men succumbed.

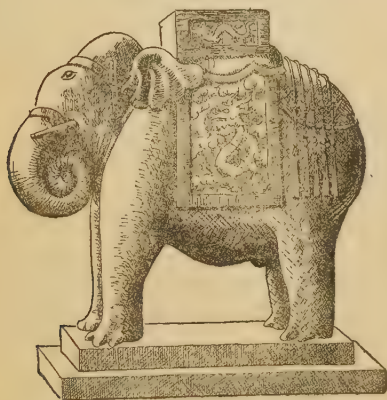
Annamite independence was henceforth doomed, but the French, if they came as buccaneers, remained as wise administrators; and the prosperous, peace-lapped native of to-day looking back on history and across the border to that hell-on-earth of famine, pestilence and wholesale robbery which is modern China can have little just cause for regret, though doubtless political buncosteers, with Soviet knives to grind, will endeavour to rouse him to it, sooner or later.

The tombs of the great Nguyen emperors lie scattered about in the hills to the south of Hué and are in their way comparable to the famous Ming and Ts'ing tombs near Peking. Space is no object. Where in Europe a whole dynasty is shoveled into a single vault, as at Escorial, in Annam each corpse gets a park to himself. The mausoleums are all laid out to the same plan in accordance with the ritual of ancestor-worship, but that of Minh-Mang is the finest and will serve for all.

Valoir and I went some miles in a car, crossed a river in a sampan laced together with strips of rattan, and wandered up an avenue of immense banyans; Valoir, who had bought a resplendent new pair of boots for the funeral, damning his corns and the bootmakers in the most blood-curdling terms the whole way. At length we came to a ten-foot wall pierced by a gate of three divisions. Valoir stopped roaring for the moment to explain that the center gate was reserved for the king and that he used it twice only, when he suc-

ceeded and when he was borne through at the last, feet first. The side doors were for his descendants coming to pay state calls on the body. Being humble folk we ourselves entered by a side door, the tradesmen's entrance.

It opened on the large paved Court of Honor. On either side stood a lion of gilded bronze, a stone elephant, a horse and five life-sized mandarins, guardians of the sepulchre. The six military mandarins carried swords, the four civil bore wands of office. A flight of steps with dragon ramps led to a pavilion sheltering a stone on which Minh-Mang's many virtues, real and



Stone elephant, Royal Tombs, Hué.

imaginary, are inscribed. From there through the red and gold "Door of Shining Merit" to a second court flanked by single-storied buildings and rows of blue and white flower-pots decorated with the imperial five-clawed dragon—common, plebeian dragons, such as you or I would have about the house, have but three claws.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



So far, we had not seen a living soul, or any sign of one; the vast mouldering place might have been completely deserted. If we were going any further we must find an attendant, Valoir declared. The guardians were supposed to live in this court. When an emperor died his concubines took up their abode in the tomb and looked after the kingly relics for the rest of their lives—which must be very dull for them. None of Minh-Mang's bereaved lady-loves could be alive, of course, but there must be somebody about. Valoir lifted up his voice and bayed like a bloodhound. Presently an old man came bobbing and shuffling out of a side door and after some palaver with Valoir let us into the "Apartments of Adoration," lighting its Stygian darkness with a dribbling stub of candle.

I saw dimly that it was a large room, the roof supported by a multitude of pillars. Then, one by one, a host of old witches appeared, materializing silently out of the surrounding gloom, issuing from behind the pillars, from black nooks and corners, rising up off the floor where they had been asleep. One arose from under a table even; I trod on her. Round I went, inspecting the king's tea-set, his chewing outfit, his pillow, slippers, wash-pot and sceptres of jade, the old hags creeping noiselessly behind me, blinking rheumy-eyed in the candlelight, half real, half shadow, saying no word, a company of sad old ghosts. I was glad when we got out into daylight again.

On a hill cut into triple terraces dedicated to the Three Powers (Earth, Air and Water) is the "Pavilion of the Soul," flanked by two tall columns each headed with a budding lotus in stone. Beyond is a crescent-shaped pool, representing the new moon enclosing within its blunted horns a circular wall which in turn represents the sun. This wall, called "Pre-



cious," encircles a little knoll grown thick with pines and scrub and somewhere underneath lie the mortal remains of Minh-Mang. Nobody knows exactly where, for the wall is endowed with magic powers rendering the interior invisible. Valoir, duck-hunting in the neighborhood thirty years previously, climbed a tree and peeped.

"What did you see?" I asked.

"Nothing," said he—which proves it.

It is possible he meant "Nothing out of the ordinary," but we will not press the matter, there is so little authentic magic about nowadays.

The idea in making the royal graves invisible is that in case of revolution the rebels cannot find the bodies and therefore cannot defile them. Gia-long is the sole exception. He alone was indifferent to what the future did with his leavings and he alone is buried with his queen beside him. The tombs of Gia-long the conqueror, Thieu-Tri the irascible, and Tu-Duc, the unlucky, we visited them all, Valoir inquiring tenderly at the last for some of the royal concubines whom he had known in his youth. He was informed that they were all dead, and was much cast down. He told me afterwards that he thought they had been poisoned, for some of them had been little more than girls when he knew them. I suggested that perhaps they had simply run away, preferring young lovers to old relics, and the idea took his fancy. It would make a good ballet, he said, on the lines of "Scheherazade." The state burial of the king; the poor little girls left to mourn for life in the gloomy apartments; the lovers breaking in; a merry dance in and out and round about the red lacquer pillars, finally the happy couples hopping over the walls and into the hills and far away; costumes by Bakst; music by Rimsky-Korsakov. So engrossed



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



with the fancy was he that he remained wrapped up in it all the way home and even forgot to mention his feet.

They are beautiful places, the Nguyen tombs, with the little pine-covered hills all about, their lotus-ponds where wild duck call and kingfishers flash, their green-tiled pavilions and placid stone mandarins standing on eternal guard. They are not old, as things go, but neglect, damp-rot and the invincible vegetation of the tropics have given them the semblance of age. Creepers have roped themselves along the crumbling walls, weeds upthrust through the broken paving, moss and lichen deck the chiselled robes of the mandarins and cover the ornate elephant howdahs, stately decay is on them, a gentle melancholy—and great peace.

In horrible contrast is the *chef-d'œuvre* of gimcrackery Khai-Dinh had erected for himself and in which we buried him. It is a ferro-concrete palace stained to represent blue marble on the outside, inside encrusted from floor to ceiling with vivid glass mosaic embodying in design every known species of beast, vegetable, poultry and domestic utensil, from a white rabbit lurking under verdant sprays ingeniously contrived from splinters of gin bottle, to an American alarm-clock.

The French call Saigon "The Pearl of the Orient," and there is no law to prevent them; but give me Hué, Hué every time. It is a delicious, fragrant little place, like an old piece of Chinese lacquer in its quaint and formal beauty. The French, with admirable taste, have done everything to preserve its charm, confining their activities to the south bank of the Hu'o'ng Giang (River of Perfumes). On the north bank the old stronghold of Gia-long stands inviolate, its green-tiled miradors lifting above the tree-tops, while under the



flame-tipped flamboyants of the Imperial Enclosure the spectacled mandarins gravely come and go; soldiers in red coats lean over little bridges studying



A Lady of Hué.

their reflections in the lilled moats, and others in green coats take the royal elephants out for walks. Everybody goes in fancy dress. The palace servants, of



whom there seem to be an inordinate number, wear tunics of many colours, and whereas the women of Tonking and Indo-China generally, wear either funereal black or sober brown, the women of royal Hué go in purple silk, flowered orange, apple-green and all sorts. Moreover they are (God bless 'em!) the best-looking in the country.

The Citadel of Hué contains everything of interest in the town, and is the town, in fact. It was built by Gia-long after the Vauban pattern, is very nearly ten kilometres in circumference and contains the Imperial Enclosure, with inside that again the Purple Enclosure where the king abides. When de Courcy & Co. took the Citadel in 1885 it boasted nearly eight hundred cannon and was filled with troops. To-day the artillery is restricted to a score of immense bronze pieces which sit idly yawning in a shed and provide excellent cover for urchins at hide and seek. The troops are reduced to a fanciful bodyguard and do not appear to do much but provide colour and make themselves agreeable. I was strolling past the South Gate one evening when a girl came through. The sentry (bristling with weapons) held her up, retired to his box, reappearing with a spray of blossom in his hand which he presented to her. Very pretty—but not what one expects of a sentry, somehow.

The Citadel, its eight hundred teeth drawn, is now nothing but a large park, an ideal place for the populace to take the air and turn its babies out to grass. On the south side, overlooking the river, is a massive work known as the *Cavalier du Roi*, though why this triple platform of solid earth and masonry should be called a "horseman" I cannot conceive. Be that as it may, it is the haunt of magpies (a pert and entertaining bird) and along about sunset provides a fine view over



the country with the purple wall of the Annamite Chain away to the west, the moat flushed with rose and saffron, and sampans with leaf-like sails drifting seawards down the shining river, the "scented" river.

The Imperial Enclosure harbours the public offices and the abodes of the mandarins, one-storied white buildings set under trees, amid groves of banana and



Pagoda Screen. Hué.

papaya, their up-curved roofs decorated with dragons, phœnixes and fantastic fish in varnished tile-work; their carved doors guarded by screens whereon unicorns (symbols of lovingkindness) prance, and tortoises (symbols of longevity—and other things less respectable) crawl amid intricate geometric patterns.

But best of all, naturally enough, is to be found in the Palace. Valoir, treading tenderly in his state boots,



and myself paid a call one warm afternoon while the Palace officials were getting its late master a day's march nearer his ferro-concrete home. A sergeant of the bodyguard scrutinised our pass very knowingly for some minutes, pronounced all in order (which was more than I hoped for, seeing he insisted on reading it upside down) and turned us over to the care of a comic little private. Our guide, as it turned out, was a recruit, had never entered the inner *sancta* before and knew no more than we did. He was nearly off his head with excitement, trotting ahead, shoving his snub nose into this door and that door, where he should and where he shouldn't, getting welcomed or rebuffed as the case might be, shouting "Don't go in there, they'll kick you," or, when he struck it lucky, dancing like a dervish and yelling, "Come in here! It's lovely!" On one occasion he disappeared through a door and did not return. We waited some time.

"He's got into the harem and been killed by a eunuch," said Valoir, whose mind followed romantic channels. "My God! Figure to yourself—a eunuch!"

"More likely to have been nipped by another sergeant and put on fatigue," said I, knowing the breed. "I'm going to have a peep in there. Stand by to sprint."

I peeped. It wasn't a harem or anything like it. It was a large empty room, bare as a barn except for a long French pier-glass nailed to one wall, and before the glass, fascinated by his own reflection, was our Narcissus. A raw country lad from the hills, it was probably the first time he had seen himself. We gave him ten minutes to recover from the shock and then towed him out backwards by the belt.

The Palace of Hué is a rambling collection of one-storied buildings, pleasant gardens and quiet cloistered



courts. The dynastic urns, vases, carvings and various bric-à-brac scattered about in the open are too numerous to mention, but especially curious and beautiful are two propylons erected by Minh-Mang, one to the Glory of the Sun, the other to the Splendour of the Moon. Each is formed of four bronze columns heavily embossed and gilded, topped with lotus-buds and carrying gaily enamelled crosspieces. They look like miraculous trees bursting into bud, buds of every hue.

The Throne and Audience Rooms are large low halls, their roofs supported by veritable forests of great ironwood pillars. The scheme of decoration is the same in both, vermilion lacquer crawling with golden dragons. Vermilion and gold from floor to ceiling, all over the ceiling, all over the pillars, glowing vermilion and shining gold—blood and fire.

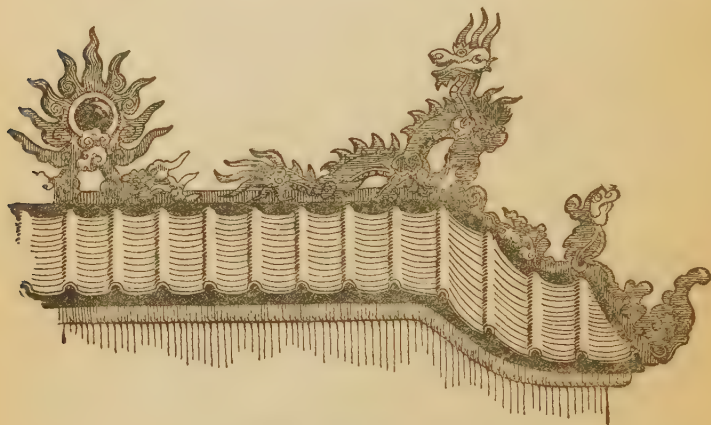
I would give a good deal to see an Audience in those rooms. The sword-bearers in flowered purple, perfume-bearers in royal blue, fan-bearers in sky blue, waving enormous yellow feather fans, musicians and guardsmen, and the ranks of mandarins, in their curious hats and gorgeous dragon-embroidered purple, down on their noses kowtowing amid clouds of incense—and all that in a setting of blood-red lacquer, scrawled with gold. I would have given much—but the mandarins were away, funeraling in their oldest pants, and it was magnificent enough, in any case.

The Throne Room is empty but for the throne, which is set under a blazing gold canopy and backed by a lovely old piece of embroidery, depicting the ever-present dragon cavorting in a circlet of blue and red clouds.

In the Audience Hall many of the king's treasures are on view—cups, bowls, vases, chopsticks and chessmen of green and white jade, gold swords and immense



amber necklaces. There was also a tree. Its stem was gilded, its leaves were made of slips of green jade, its fruit of polished agate and rock-crystal, its berries of coral and pearl; little birds encrusted with jewel-dust perched on its golden boughs. The attendant clicked an electric switch and the fabulous toy lit up, sparkling and glittering. Our little soldier swayed towards it, a-gasp. He pawed the glass with his fingers, crowed like a baby, his eyes stood out on



Roof decoration. Hué.

stalks, his jaw sagged. There was no getting him away from it. The aged attendant appealed to him and to us. Evening was coming on, time to close down. The little soldier took no notice of anybody. Twice we went to the door and called to him and twice returned. Useless. He did not hear. He was enchanted. He would have remained there all night, I believe, had not Valoir, whose boots were getting beyond a joke, again drawn him out backwards by the belt. It had to be done, but it was like dragging a



HUE



child from its first Christmas-tree; the angels of
Heaven surely wept.

RONDEAU CHINOIS

Let us pretend. . . . Black as a raven's wing
Is your sleek hair wherein pale blossoms cling.
Your lips are carmine and your eyes are jet,
Beneath fine pencilled brows obliquely set.
You take a lute and lift your voice and sing.

I am a nodding mandarin. I bring
You gifts of jade of crafty fashioning;
Also my heart, which, please, do not forget.
Let us pretend.

In the dark trees the orange lanterns swing.
Night-opening flowers their heavy incense fling.
The huntress moon has climbed the parapet
And snared the garden in a silver net;
The sea-winds whisper of their gypsying. . . .
Let us pretend.

CHAPTER XV

THE FUNERAL OF A KING

On November 6th, 1925, Dai-Hanh-Hoang-Khai-Dinh, King of Annam, "mounted the dragon's back," or, to put it briefly, died. Seven diamonds were put in the mouth of the corpse, which was washed, embalmed, dressed in state robes, placed in a huge red and gold lacquer coffin and covered over with young tea-leaves. Ten days later official mourning was inaugurated with the sacrifice of a bullock, a goat and a pig. A portrait of the late monarch, painted on silk, was placed on the throne. Paper invocations were burnt, massed lamentations rent the air four times daily for sixty days. Offerings were made to the royal manes and all hands were kept busy performing the elaborate and endless ritual laid down in the great Chinese Book of Rites. The royal astrologers—without whose advice nothing is done in Hué Court circles—consulted the stars as to the date of the funeral. The stars decided that the three last days of January, 1926, would be propitious—and, as far as I was concerned, they made a lucky throw, it being a period when I was malaria-free.

On the morning of the 29th Valoir and I were up betimes. Just as we were starting he produced a small box containing a gold plaque representing a pair of dragons, intertwined. It was an Annamite order, he explained, bestowed on him for meritorious tomb-rifling. A fantastic bauble, but the wearing of it might entitle us to a certain amount of respect. What did I think? I told him most certainly to wear it; we needed



THE FUNERAL OF A KING



all the respect we could get—especially if he were going to blaspheme at his boots the whole day. Having 'lost the string, he fixed the thing to his top shirt-button, just below his bow-tie, and we set off.

All Annam was in Hué, dressed in its best and brightest. Sampans swarmed about the bridge, packed with expectant people. Gay shrines lined the way, hung with flowers and paper streamers. Bunting, citron and scarlet, fluttered in the breeze. Route-keepers in green and red held the crowds in check, chasing small boys out of the way, swacking them over their mushroom hats—chastisement that produced a maximum of noise with a minimum of pain. A blue sky beamed over all, reflected clouds swam like swans on the River of Perfumes. Everything was merry and bright. It was like going to a fair rather than a funeral. The procession was about half a mile long, stretching almost from the Palace to the Citadel gates and was the finest and most fantastic circus parade I ever did see, the efforts of Barnum and Bailey, Schumann or the exalted Sanger not excepted. As Valoir remarked, "*Nous manquons qu'une girafe.*"

At the head of the column were two elephants, hung with tassels and embroidered cloths and topped with crimson howdahs and yellow umbrellas. Never have I seen animals so unutterably bored. They lolled against each other, eyes closed—and slumbered. But for an occasional twitch of an ear or tail they might have been dead. Their boredom was understandable when you came to think of it. An elephant is a long-lived beast. No elephant gets his photograph in the papers on reaching the century: it is far too common an occurrence. These two were full-grown; elderly, even. It is possible that they featured at the obsequies of Thieu-Tri, and there have been innumerable royal funerals



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



since. At one period kings weren't stopping on the throne of Annam long enough to get the cushions warm. What was a very novel and splendid exhibition to me was stale stuff to these beasts.

"All very fine for you, mister," they might have said. "First time and all that. Can drop out and buy yourself a drink any time you like. All very well for you, Henry, in a feather-weight gent's suiting; but what about us, tight-laced front and back with about a ton of passengers, brollies, flags and furniture up top? Three mortal days of it, too! O-oo-a-h!—We yawn."

I can see the point—nevertheless, I think they might have pulled themselves together and displayed a little more of the proper funeral spirit.

Behind the slumbering elephants were royal lancers dressed in scarlet tunics laced with yellow, bestriding ponies so small they had difficulty in keeping their spurs from hitching in the ground and pulling them off backwards.

Next came the Palace musicians with their curious instruments, and a Cinderella coach of vermilion lacquer scrawled over with golden clouds and dragons and drawn by a team of tiny white ponies—it might have come out of the Fairy Godmother's pumpkin on the stage of Drury Lane.

At this point a native constable barred the way. Valoir remonstrated with him.

"Do you behold this?" said he, pointing to his chest. "This is the order of the second degree of the Great Pink Poo-poo" (or something of the sort), "I'll have you know, and ranks me as a mandarin. Observe!"

The policeman and I both studied Valoir's chest, but observed nothing save a barren button-thread.

"It's gone," said I. "You've dropped it."

"Gone! Dropped it! Name of a d— Ah!" He



clapped both hands to his thigh and retired into a mandarin's garden limping as though shot through the leg.

I followed. "What's the matter?"

"I've got it."

"Got what? The cramp?"

"No—the order!"

"Where?"

"It's slipped down my drawers. . . ."

Under the shelter of a magnolia-bush I unbuttoned Valoir and retrieved the Poo-poo. With it once more fixed in position, this time by my collar pin, we fared forth again, Valoir looking like the winning poodle at a dog show. But the charm worked; no one hindered us further.

Behind the mute orchestra were forests of state umbrellas glowing like many-coloured toadstools; forests of waving banners and oriflammes representing the five elements (earth, air, fire, water and metal), the twenty-five governing constellations, or embroidered with golden dragons and emblems of the sun and moon. Next was a sort of movable maypole, a mast hung with streamers of all colours, carried by porters in apple-green. Here we met with a notable and magnificent person, a stout elderly man dressed in a purple coat crawling with orange and azure dragons, a scarlet cummerbund and a black and gold cap—a glory somewhat marred by his lower end, cheap cotton drawers stuffed into brown cotton socks, the last maintained by very visible chrome suspenders. He was the director of the whole procession, Valoir whispered, and an old friend. The two greeted each other heartily. The mandarin squatted down by the wayside and sucked at a pipe which a watchful servant brought him. He had been up all night, he said, and didn't suppose he'd get



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



any sleep till it was all over. He looked very tired and bored. A gun boomed out from the *Cavalier du Roi*. The director adjusted his suspenders and rose wearily. That was a signal. They should be off in a minute—provided anybody could persuade the elephants to get a move on.

We passed down the column. Next to the maypole were some extraordinary beings, grotesques, pantomime ogres. They were the Palace actors dressed to represent the "Eight Redoubtable Warriors." Their faces were chalked and rouged and painted in the most ludicrous manner, noses reddened till they glowed like ripe cherries, crescents of rouge on their cheeks, blue streaks under their eyes and across their foreheads. On their heads were erections of gilt filigree. Flags suspended on wires protruded from their shoulder-blades. They were fantastically and elaborately arrayed in tarnished finery and bore in their hands wooden replicas of the weapons with which Annam made war before civilisation introduced machine-guns, mustard-gas and other labour-saving appliances. But their chief glories were their beards and their boots. The former were hooked to their ears and fell in ginger cascades from upper-lips to waists. Separate strands hung from beside their ears, representing whiskers. Their boots were enormous, knee-high, soled with massive blocks of wood and turned up ten to twelve inches at the toe. To see these mock heroes under way was a sorry spectacle. I watched them later toiling up the Nam-Gio hill, wheezing and panting behind the ginger gags, rolling and shuffling in the unwieldy boots. The mild coolie faces were sweating under their fearsome painted scowls, causing the paint to run; the cherry noses looked terribly overripe.

Following the actors were red-painted booths each



THE FUNERAL OF A KING



borne by twelve green-clad porters and containing the king's decorations and personal effects, also cardboard models of the royal palaces and vehicles, the elephant and pony carriages, Cinderella coach, palanquin, rickshaw, state barge and yacht, with toy elephants, ponies, drivers, sailors, soldiers, trees and shrubs, all complete as the case might be.



Priests.

Next came gongs, paper lanterns and paper vases filled with flowers. Then the *bonzes* (priests), rivaling the actors in the extravagance of their costumes; a dozen of the lower order—curates, let us say—in red hats and black and white checkerboard coats, and a dozen of bishop rank telling beads just like good Catholics and swathed in hooded vestments that were marvellous patchworks of colour.



By this time we were nearing the scarlet and orange pavilion under which the first ceremonies of prayer and obeisance were performed. They were just over. An old bearded mandarin in a gorgeous coat of royal blue struck with a wooden hammer on a silver gong. The procession began to shuffle slowly forward—somebody in front had found means to rouse the elephants, apparently. One hundred and sixty trained porters, clad in black and white, crouched under the red lacquer poles of the giant bier—slips of bamboo had been placed between their teeth to stop them from chattering.

Slowly, steadily, keeping the prescribed horizontal, the huge thing rose. Six tons it weighed and special bridges had to be built to accommodate it. Slowly, steadily it moved towards us, preceded by solemn-stepping heralds in white; flagbearers in sea-green carrying dragon banners of crimson and emerald, blue and gold. Men in flowered purple marched also, shouldering long silver-mounted swords; men in royal blue with silver perfume-burners and fly-switches; men in white with burning tapers; men in azure carrying great yellow feather fans; men in purple caps carrying black feather fans, and four military mandarins carrying gold-scabbarded swords and wearing magnificent maroon coats embroidered with orange dragons.

By they went, the blues and the purples, the gold and the silver, the lighted tapers and the smoking burners. Then the bier, twinkling with tinsel and glass, the canopy fringes hung with little dolls and paper lanterns—and close behind the bier a host of princes and governors, shambling along in coarse white garments, cotton umbrellas raised against the sun.

I bared my head and bent it reverently. Slowly I raised my eyes to see that some one among the High



THE FUNERAL OF A KING



and Mighty was smiling and nodding in my direction. It could not be to *me*, of course. But it was to me, and the somebody was my acquaintance of the Vinh express whose trousers I had wanted to wash, the handshaking Governor of T——. There was no mistake about it. He stepped out of the procession and we did some more handshaking. How was I? Where was I staying? How long was I stopping? How did I like Hué and the funeral? Nobody had put a slip of bamboo between *his* teeth; he prattled away nineteen to the dozen.

"Come in under my umbrella," he invited. "The sun. . . . Tell me how you are getting on. Walk with me."

"Walk with you?" I blathered. "With *you*? Here? Now? In that procession?"

"Certainly," he replied. "Why not?"

Like one in a dream, I stepped in under the umbrella and walked with him, right in the middle of the princes and potentates, in the front row of the chief mourners—me! "Good Lord!" I said to myself. "Is this really happening or am I still in bed?"

Said His Excellency: "Have you by any chance one of those so excellent cigarettes about you? My servant is following with my pipe, but it is too big to smoke on the march. I thought . . . perhaps . . ."

Still in a daze, I produced my case, gave him a cigarette and lit it for him. "He'll be talking about the *Moulin Rouge* in a minute," said I to myself. "Good Lord!"

A mandarin on the other side of me shot an envious glance at the governor. Timidly, half expecting to be smitten to the earth, I offered him the case also. He accepted a cigarette with celerity and gratitude. Emboldened, I handed the case all round. Nobody smote



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



me to the earth. They were all perishing for a smoke, poor souls! "Oh, well," thought I, "it's their funeral, not mine," and lit up myself. "This is a wonderful world," I thought. "Here am I marching along with elephants and ogres, chief mourner to an emperor I never saw in my life. Of course it isn't real. I'm Alice and this is Wonderland. Roll on!"

We rolled on, a pageant of brilliant, tossing colour, out of the citadel, over the river, and up the hill, elephants, ogres, flags, gongs, maypoles, mandarins—and me.

The cortège camped for the night in the pine-woods of Nam-Gio. I went out after dinner, up a long avenue of fir-trees picked out on either side by the glow-worm lights of cake and sweetmeat venders. The coffin and much of the paraphernalia were housed in a big yellow and crimson tent. Tired porters lay asleep inside; others outside; one saw bare, sweat-stained legs protruding from under the sheeted booths and maypoles. Others again had just dropped straight down in the grass and lay outstretched to the rains and dews in the abandon of utter weariness. The place looked like a battlefield, for bodies lying about. Festoons of lamps hung about the tent, torches of sandalwood blazed in a ring around it, clouds of aromatic smoke blowing hither and thither. Deep in the gloomy, mysterious pine-woods hundreds of little lights blinked and twinkled—the candles and fires of poor folk who were following their king, step by step, to his journey's end. It was as though the forest aisles were sprinkled with flickering falling stars.

The second day was spent in getting the coffin from Nam-Gio to the mausoleum and was a mere repetition of the first.



THE FUNERAL OF A KING



The actual interment took place on the morning of the third day. Valoir and I were up and away in the rickshaws at dawn, splashing over miry red roads, rain lashing at us with chill whips. Valoir, poking his head through the hood-slit like a tortoise from its shell, bawled across to me that this rain was a bad omen, he didn't like it. The astrologers were to blame . . . ought to be sacked. Bad! Bad! I asked to whom the omen referred, the deceased or us? But he had telescoped again and did not hear. We arrived at the mausoleum and mounted to the topmost terrace, the Pink Poo-Poo, which was serving Valoir practically as a necktie, availing as a *passepartout*. The place swarmed with natives and there were many French officials present. Plump little officers with stomachs like rainbows for medal ribbons—there must be a lot of heroism going on in Indo-China, quietly—and civilians in dinner jackets. I must say a fellow looks pretty much of a damn fool got up in a shirt-front and an eating-suit at 8 A. M.—however, "*autres pays, autres mœurs*."

The bier was got out of the tent in which it had passed the night, borne up the hill, still at the horizontal, and placed on a red lacquer truck. At either side of the coffin and away down the long passage leading to the subterranean vault stood mandarins with burning tapers, the tiny flames shining in starry perspective right into the dark bosom of the hill. Varenne, Governor-General of Indo-China, pronounced a deep bass oration, addressing the defunct with the familiar *tu*. A mandarin prostrated himself before the coffin, asking the dead king's permission to bury him.

Valoir nudged me. "It's all right," he whispered. "What is?"

"The omens. Look!" He pointed aloft to a patch



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



of blue sky showing through the grey rain-clouds. "Sunshine. Good! Good!"

The princes and mandarins laid hold of a second truck and pushed the first before them down the passage, at the same moment breaking into loud lamentations. The noise of their sobbing—sharpest of all that of the royal women, hidden in the vault itself—came echoing up the passage in intermittent waves. Most eerie it sounded. It was as though one heard the wailing of lost souls crying out in the deep, dark places of the earth.

In a few minutes the mourners were out in the daylight again and the vault doors were being sealed. The spirit of Khai-Dinh was on its way to the Ten Judgment Halls of the Infernal Regions, to pass before the Mirror of the Past wherein he would see all his deeds reflected, together with their consequences; to drink the Water of Forgetfulness, and pass on through transmigration to transmigration till he attained the Pure Land and a state of blessed nothingness. And Bao-Dai—weeping bitterly, poor little chap—reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS

I went from Hué to Tourane in a private touring car on a day of howling monsoon and torrential rain. We raced over miles of rice-land, over miles of barren heath, beside sullen swamps and weedy, duck-ridden lagoons. Mountains were closing in on us from the west all the time, shouldering the road towards the sea. At length, as at the Annam Gate, sea and mountains met. The road ran along a sand-spit with breakers crashing on the one hand, a lagoon on the other, entered a village which seemed to be populated with pigs and paved with giant oyster-shells, and came to a stop in the sea itself.

Driving rain, grey and miserable, enveloped us. A tawny white-lipped swell came rolling over the bar, rocking the ferry float. Our French lady passenger shrieked out that we would be upset and she drowned. In vain I pointed out that she would have some difficulty in doing so, as there could not be more than four feet of water under us; that she could cling to the bottom of the float, or, if she preferred it, to me. She was a comely person and the prospect was not altogether unpleasing.

All in vain. She persisted in her squeals and in due course infected her silly husband. I could have spanked the pair of them. We crossed without accident and the lady shut off steam as with a tap. At one moment she was going off like an alarm-clock, at the next all charm and calm—wonderful. We went roar-



ing up the flanks of the barrier range, good nature completely restored.

On either hand the jungle pressed, huge trees smothered to the topmost twig in mantles of creeper. Rain drummed on the car-hood and danced in sheets on the road. Streams came leaping down the cliff-sides in soil-stained cataracts, swirled through culverts and plunged on down towards the growling sea. Two hinds, followed by a stag, sprang out of the woods and bounded along the road in front of the car.

We topped a ridge, halted, and got out. My friend pointed to the remains of a wall and a single black arch. This was the Pass of the Clouds, the southern counterpart of the Gate of Annam. It was aptly named. Clouds swept round, under and over us—you could almost feel their clammy fringes brush your cheek. The gorges were choked with cloud, the mountains wrapped in it. It was as though the jungle were afire, belching unending volumes of dingy smoke, rolling and streaming.

My friend regretted that fog hid the Bay of Tourane. He stabbed the fog with his forefinger, pointing at what I should have seen under better conditions. The Bay—a wide gulf of blue-green water, strewn with sampan sails. Over there the towering mass of Tien-Sa Mountain with the pilot-station and anchorage at its base. Farther over, the Marble Mountains. Down below us was Nam-Chon. The engineer, Besson, who was making the first road survey, got murdered in Nam-Chon, with all his escort. The relief party found their burnt bodies laid out on the beach, minus ears and noses. Besson's head was found in a neighbouring village, pickled in salt. A fine road, eh?

Downhill we swooped, through the roof of clouds,



THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS



zigzagging crazily, and sped across the sand-flats that fringe the bay, night upon us, howling and pouring. I dismounted at the door of Tourane's hotel. My friend apologised for the weather, spoiling the view and all that.

"The *crachin*, you mean," I said; "the spitting or drizzle."

He nodded quite solemnly. "Yes, the drizzle."

I was too polite and far too soaked to laugh.

Tourane is a village stretched to its utmost to look like a town. It straggles along the river-front, which serves the triple purpose of wharf, main street and railway-track. It boasts a mayor. I mention this because everybody in Tourane does. You cannot hold three minutes' conversation without the dignitary cropping up. "Our mayor—you know we have a mayor?" "Yes, the bar needs dredging, but we have a mayor, you know?" they say.

Apparently other towns are not similarly blessed.* I do not know why the possession of a mayor is considered so fortunate, or what Tourane has done to merit this singular felicity, but there it is. Tourane has a mayor.

Besides the mayor, Tourane has very smart sampans, about twenty-five feet long, built of woven cane from the top-sides down, mere baskets really, but three-masted, sharp-built and fast. There is not a scrap of metal in their construction. They are held together with wooden pegs or rattan laces. Their shrouds are of rattan, their ropes of bamboo fibre, their sails of palm-leaf. After a day of fever I used to crawl down to the river-front and watch them running out to the fishing-grounds. A pretty sight they were, racing downriver, close-hauled to the sea breeze. Father perched like a monkey on the end of a spar run out



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



to windward (to keep the balance); mother at the helm, Baby Babs strapped to her back; Freddy, George and little Claribel standing by the sheets and brails. Did a squall come whistling over the sand-banks, round went the hooker into the wind and up went the sails in the spillers. The squall whisked by and in a second the sails were down again and sheeted home and the boat on her course. No crack yachtsmen could have been smarter.

Here also I saw coracles as used by the ancient Britons, round baskets pitched with a mixture of lime and wood-oil. The bigger fishing-junks used them as punts. At Nha-Trang I saw four men and a boy paddle ashore in a thing no bigger than a bathtub. They reminded me of the Wise Men of Gotham of nursery rhyme.

Besides the mayor and the sampans, Tourane boasts a museum of Cham sculpture, small but packed with interest. The Chams were Brahminists and the moment you enter you know that, territorially speaking, the influence of China is giving way to that of India, the Dragon to the Lotus. The statues displayed are pure Hindu. Here is Ganesa, the elephant-headed; Nanda, the white bull; Garuda with his beak and feathers. Skanda, general of celestial armies, stands on a peacock's back, the tail spread out behind him. Brahma sits on an open lotus-flower. Vishnu holds in his four hands the discus, the mace, conch-shell and lotus. And here is the great god Siva in many forms, dancing in triumph, terrible in war, or sitting in meditation, smiling to himself; in this last case wearing a neat little moustache of the kind I myself support and which was described by a Chinese lady as "one piecee Chaplin."

Here also are mundane subjects, wrestlers in bas-



THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS



relief, polo players, chariots and horsemen in running combat, and a court scene. The king sits in the centre under two parasols; one slave holds a fly-switch, another a spittoon, four dancing girls clad in ropes of jewels and little else posture to the clash of drums and cymbals. More dancing girls frisk all round the head of a column, a couple of score of them. It is the merriest, most rhythmic thing in stone I have ever seen.

The Marble Mountains are some six or seven miles from Tourane. I hired a rickshaw and a couple of boys, crossed the river in a sampan navigated by a pair of venerable but efficient ladies, bowled down an avenue of stunted fir and came out upon the seashore. Tien-Sa rose, cloud-capped, at our backs. On the eastern horizon a shadowy island loomed, now visible, now hidden by sweeping curtains of rain. Far away, across the long miles of beach, the Marble Mountains lifted their jagged crests above the dunes, blurred with flying mists of sand and spindrift. Along the shore the tawny breakers crashed and ravaged, clots of foam whirling inland like blown thistledown.

The boys took the rickshaw right down to the water's edge and trotted along on the hard wet sand, pulling easily. Occasionally, however, an overreaching breaker was too quick for them, soaking them to the waist and me to the knees. Four fishermen, clad only in short palm-leaf coats and conical hats, came paddling towards us. Suddenly they wheeled like a troupe of ballet dancers and prancing waist-deep into the surf flung their nets as one. It was a pretty sight, but I'm sorry to say they caught nothing—not that time.

From that point onward not a living thing did we meet, man, beast, sea-gull even. A desolate shore with the sand driving like hail and the breakers moaning. On we went, on and on, the mountains of our desire



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



never growing appreciably nearer, but retreating before us like some desert mirage. But at long last we were abreast of them. The boys dropped the shafts, intimating that I must walk the rest of the way, and slunk away into the hummocks, leaving the rickshaw stranded on a sandhill like some abandoned ship. I hitched up my belt and set out.

Within fifty yards I had company, two sun-blackened



We plodded ahead.

urchins and a dog, materialising as by magic out of a bunker. Horace was aged eight (perhaps), Morris four (maybe). They divided a suit between them, Horace wearing the trousers, Morris the jacket. Myself, wearing not only trousers and jacket but a shirt besides, felt somewhat overdressed. Horace's head was shorn but for three trailing strands. Morris' single tuft spouted like a jet from the top of his scalp.



THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS



The dog had not been tampered with—a plain dog. The three formed themselves into an escort and we plodded ahead in silent communion.

The Marble Mountains rise up out of the sand-waves like five great tusks. There is no other mountain, hill or even rock for miles, just these grey monoliths standing lonely and sand-blown on a desolate shore. Each is dedicated to a separate element. That to which my escort steered me was "Water" and the largest. Up innumerable steps of grey, white and rosy marble we climbed, to a terrace whereon was a small Buddhist temple containing the usual collection of gilt images, gongs and drums. The mountain was perforated like a sponge. A *bonze* appeared and led me up and down gloomy tunnels and galleries—the throb of the breakers echoing after us—through and through the rock from grotto to terrace, from view to view.

Eastward out to sea to where the mysterious island appeared and disappeared through racing clouds and squalls; southward over miles of sand-dunes, tossing cane-brakes and shining rice-swamps to Fai-fo. My escort had by this time swollen to four priests and six children, coming I know not wherefrom. It is like that in the East. I believe that if one were to drop out of an *aëroplane* into the middle of the Gobi Desert one would not be alone five minutes. A solemn curious child would rise up out of nowhere, followed shortly by ten more.

Down another dark tunnel I was led, into a subterranean temple, a cavern about sixty feet high, lit by three air-holes in the roof through which the lianes and air-roots trailed like octopus-arms feeling for prey. The mountain-peak was hollow, a mere limestone shell! Water dripped with the punctual beat of a clock. Green slime covered the walls, also pious mot-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



toes, carved and painted. Little gilt images squatted here and there on rocky shelves, each with an altar for joss-sticks and offerings set hopefully before it. Four big scowling genii, mounted on lions and brandishing swords and axes, guarded the entrance.

I distributed largesse at the rate of ten cents an adult and five cents an infant (with which they appeared highly satisfied), slaked my thirst at a font of trickling water, and went home—to learn that the water has magic properties and is considered an infallible aid to pregnancy. The faithful tar babies escorted me back to the rickshaw, Horace silent but smiling, Morris clenching his five cents and humming a queer little song of his own. The dog remained undemonstrative to the end.

I headed southward from Tourane in a public conveyance, packed, as usual, inside and out, my sole white companion a red-bearded Frenchman. Dawn came up over the Marble Mountains, delicate colour stealing across the sky like blushes on the silken cheek of a girl. Naked fishermen stood waist-deep in roseate lagoons. Poultrymen strode afield, herding their ducks like sheep before them. Laden sampans paddled downstream to market, drifting silently under the bamboos, the white mists rising like steam about them. Brick-kilns smoked, tended by naked men who seemed formed of their own red clay. In Fai-fo we halted.

Fai-fo is a river port, known to the Portuguese, Dutch and English as far back as 1643 and much used by the Chinese and Japanese. The Japanese have gone, leaving their mark behind them in the shape of a curious covered bridge with a centre way for vehicles and sidewalks for pedestrians. At one end are two



THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS



stone monkeys, hands piously folded, at the other end two dogs. All have cloths thrown mantilla-wise over their heads. The tenacious Chinaman remains in strength, exporting rice, sugar, precious woods, cinnamon-bark and sea-swallows' nests to Hongkong and the Yang-tse. The little port is chiefly remarkable for its Chinese temples and its lepers. I motored over from Tourane one day and nosed about the place and wherever I went a poor wretch lay in wait, raising twisted, suppliant hands.

In one of the temples was a splendid model of an ocean-going junk, placed there, I presume, as a thank-offering, much as Breton seamen hung ship models to the rafters of their churches. Six feet long was this junk, with windlass, galley and joss-house all complete, five flags hanging over her dragon-painted stern.

Southward from Fai-fo we rumbled, sand-dunes to the left, paddy to the right, down mile upon mile of ribboning road where no shade was, leaving behind us a pale dust-fog hanging in the air. At intervals rivers barred the way and were crossed on primitive, man-handled floats. A blind beggar accompanied us on one transit, clicking a piece of wood against a broken saucer and singing not unpleasantly. Red-head and I contributed the equivalent of one shilling to the collection. Our driver told us that the musician would not sing again for a week. On another transit we had for fellow-passengers a man who carried in his arms a full-grown mouse deer no bigger than a hare, also a girl with two big frails brimful with yellow silk cocoons.

By mid-afternoon the country had changed from flats to hills, rice-fields gave place to fenced plots, each with a thatched shelter mounted on stilts wherein a watchman sat to defend his crops from predatory



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



beasts. Up a mountainside we roared, and over a pass—and the country changed again. Palms we had met before, in twos and threes and scattered clumps, but here below us was a sea of palms, a sea of vibrant greenery filling the league-wide valley from range to range.

Downhill we plunged, and under the sea, out of the heat and glare into a twilight green, cool, delicious. Shafts of light filtered down through the leaves like sunlight filtering down through sea-water. The palm-trunks were the stems of giant streaming seaweeds—one half expected to see fish lazily finning in and out between them. The fronds whispered together overhead and their sound was as of little waves lispings along a shore.

She is the queen of the tropics, the cokernut palm. No other palm can stand with her. The date palm is clumsier and ragged of stem. The sugar palm is well proportioned, but its leaves are dingy. The areca is neat and pretty, but attains no great height, a feather-duster. The fan-tailed travelers' palm is decorative, but a shrub by comparison. The sealing-wax palm has cheerful colour, but nothing else. The royal palm stands stiff as a grenadier and looks artificial, a tree made of concrete for Wembley or Coney Island. But the cokernut palm, with her slim height, her languid grace, her fresh green, plummy head-dress—she is the palm for me, the loveliest tree I know.

By evening we were out on the plains again and saw on either hand, each on its own hill—the great top-heavy Cham towers, red-flushed with sunset. The early history of the Chams is hazy, but they were a Malayo-Polynesian race who were very powerful in their day, possessing all the coast region from Cap St. Jaques as far north as the Annam Gate. At the end



THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS



of the tenth century, weakened by wars with the Khmers, they began to lose hold and now no longer exist as a people. Says friend Marco Polo of "Chamba" (Champa): "The people are idolaters and pay a yearly tribute to the Great Kaan which consists of elephants and nothing but elephants. . . . In the year of Christ 1285 Messer Marco Polo was in that country, and at that time the King had, between sons and daughters, 326 children. There are a very great number of elephants in that country, and they have lignaloes (eagle-wood) in great abundance. They have also extensive forests of the wood called Bonús, which is jet black, and of which chessmen and pen-cases are made. But there is nought more to tell, so let us proceed."

Let us, by all means. Nightfall saw us halted in the port of Qui-Nhon. The sole European hotel was full to overflowing.

"I will go ahead and try a native inn," said Red Head to me. "Follow when you've got your baggage." In due course I followed, to meet him returning. "Full up, too," he reported, "but the proprietor says he'll find us beds."

"Where?" I asked.

"I don't know, but these rickshaw boys do. Some sort of annex, I suppose."

We bowled out of town and stopped at a villa in the suburbs. A rickshaw-boy entered, returning later with two servants who took our traps into the house. In a large room, furnished partly in European, partly in native style, an old Annamite reclined on a settee. He rose at our entrance and shook hands cordially. He understood one of us was a Britisher, said he, speaking difficult French. Which? I told him I came under that heading. He studied me with interest. In what



physical respects he expected me to differ from any other European I know not, but I'm afraid I was a disappointment. My ears and eyes are more or less in the usual places and I have the customary complement of limbs.

"This doesn't look like an annex," I managed to whisper to Red Head. "Where are we?"

He raised his shoulders to his ears in that expressive gesture with which a Frenchman indicates that he's damned if he knows.

We were then treated to an excellent native meal of odds and ends in bowls, also a bottle of Sauterne. If my appearance was wofully commonplace I am happy to say I provided some excitement in the disposal of that repast. Red Head, an old Colonial, handled his chopsticks to the manner born, but with me, if I can catch on to anything at all, there's no foretelling its destination. When I sit down to feed myself with chopsticks dogs gather round and do well. Not wishing to spatter the old gentleman's house with flying *chow* morsels I asked for a fork.

A fork? Yes, they believed they had one somewhere, but what did I want it for? To eat with? *Eat* with a fork? Land sakes! The instrument was produced and all hands—our host's wife and daughter, servants included—clustered round to watch me do the trick. Had I been a sword-swallower they could not have been more enthralled. "Tluc! tluc! Look at that! And never pricks himself once!"

Our host bade us good-night, and, as we were arising at three-thirty, good-by also. As tactfully as possible we asked him what we owed for the night's entertainment. He would not take one cent. The hotel proprietor who had passed us on was his son. He had sent word that two strangers were in danger of pass-



ing the night in the streets. Would he take them in for the honor of Qui-Nhon? It had been his duty and pleasure to do so. Red Head slept the night soundly and noisily in a European bed, but I, being the junior, had a shake-down on a red lacquer couch in the Hall of Ancestors, before an altar loaded with images and offerings. The couch was too short by far and my legs stuck out of the coverings and were unmercifully



The outraged ancestors.

chewed by mosquitoes—or perhaps by the outraged Ancestors—but that was no fault of the kind old Annamite and his hospitable family.

Next day we had distinguished company, another governor, returning from the funeral with his secretary, youngest wife, small daughter and smaller son, the last in a coat of flowered blue. I do not dislike children, but they are by no means my favourite animals and I was not overjoyed when (the bus being



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



crammed, as ever) the young gentleman elected to sit on me for the day. However, he slept a good deal, I seemed to amuse him and he certainly amused me, so we got on very well.

We spent the morning switchbacking along the sea-coast, high up among the steamy hill-mists at one moment, then skirting the shores of turquoise bays. Cokernut palms grew along the beaches, leaning against the blue, their roots sunk in blinding white sand, giving the exotic impression of palms growing in snow. Fisher nets, freshly hauled and hung up to dry, glistened like dewy spider-webs.

I lunched at a government bungalow under the shadow of a red Cham tower and shortly afterwards was crossing the Song-Ba. This was an undertaking. Four men poled for dear life. Three amphibians, stripped to loin strings, burnt black with sun, plunged into the current and hauled on ropes, feeling their way from sand-bank to sand-bank, dragging the float through tortuous shifting channels. At times they were only waist-deep, at others in up to the chin; now and again they went under altogether and were forced to let go the ropes and swim for it. One hour and forty minutes it took to cross a river no wider than the Thames at Greenwich.

For the rest of the day we were among wild mountains grown thick with jungle. Stone peaks, like ruined castles, towered over us. Giant boulders, fantastically piled, knotted together with lianes and tree-roots, overhung the way. The road ran like a snake between them, doubling and squirming, sneaking through chinks in the cliffs, leaping the gorges on airy bridges. The jungle swarms with savage life, they tell me, buck, wild goats, cats and pig, panthers, bears and tigers, but all we saw that day was a single lordly peacock,



sunning himself on a strip of greensward, his waistcoat purple glory.

At the top of the last descent the native driver asked casually if anybody would like to get out and walk down. Nobody volunteered. The driver nodded a genial, "Please yourselves," and pushed into gear. But Red Head was curious. Why, in Heaven's name, should anybody want to walk? The driver shrugged. Oh, no reason at all. But seeing that his brakes were hanging by a thread, and what had happened to his predecessor only last week, he thought, perhaps. . . .

As one man we demanded what had happened to his predecessor. Oh, hadn't we heard? Bus got out of control on this same hill and went over a precipice, three hundred feet or so. . . .

The Oriental may be of a contemplative nature, but there are times when he can bestir himself. Had a magician waved his wand he could not have cleared that bus any quicker. Nor was I one whit behind, I may say. I tucked that poor child under my arm as though he were a brown paper parcel and went straight out over the side. Deprived of victims, the brakes decided to hang on for the time being, and by evening Nha-trang was before us, on the opposite bank of a river whereon rode a host of junks, rolling in the swell of the bar. Over a far headland, low down in the south, I saw a faint cluster of stars pricking the sky. It was the Southern Cross, an old friend, companion of many lonely camps.

A great concourse of notables had gathered to welcome their governor. A state barge waited to bear him across. Four men in blue and red unfolded four big ceremonial umbrellas and held them over him. At the foot of the slip a thought struck him and he beckoned to me. Might he give me a lift over? It would



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



be quicker than the ferry and more comfortable, plenty of cushions. I snapped at the offer; it is not every day that I get the chance of free rides in state barges. All Nha-trang was on the opposite shore, awed coolies standing agape, hats in hand; neat officials with ivory tablets, making their funny little bows. The barge grounded, the governor disembarked and walked up the slip, myself close on his heels, chest inflated, swelling with dignity.

Thus, amid bowing mandarins, under ceremonial umbrellas, I came to Nha-trang—and it seemed to me that the Southern Cross was winking with all its eyes.

CHAPTER XVII

SAIGON

The railway from Nha-trang to Saigon wanders along the coast for nearly one hundred miles, skirting the great, landlocked bays of Cam-ranh and Phan-rang. Towards the end of the Russo-Japanese War the Russians scratched together a collection of obsolete gunboats, yachts, tenders, etc., and dispatched them East, to the relief of Port Arthur. The world watched their lame progress as far as Singapore—but after that they disappeared, vanished, as by magic, from the face of the waters. They were eventually discovered hiding between the jungle and the islets of Cam-ranh and Phan-rang and the ferret that bolted them was a single English newspaper man.

Forsaking the coast, the railway runs alternately through belts of desert and jungle, thirsty red plains grown with dry grass and thorn-scrub, each bush with an ants' nest moulded about its stem, a football of black mud. Other ant-heaps, stalagmites of red mud, spouted up here and there; in the distance arid ranges gnawed with broken teeth at the sky. A few gaunt cattle browsed listlessly among the thorns. What few natives we passed went naked and were burnt black with sun. A swimming heat-haze danced over everything; like the haze over a stove. The scene was African, up among the baked pans and kopjes of Northern Bechuanaland.

Then would come an abrupt change and we were burrowing into jungle and could mark what a tangle



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



nature can get itself into when left alone. Mammoth trees, bearded with air-roots and lianes, loomed on either side of the track like cañon walls, beneath them grew an underbrush of bamboo, scrub and palmetto, the whole lashed together into an impenetrable mass with net-works of wild vine and convolvulus. By late afternoon we were over the border among the rice-flats of Cochin-China and evening fell with the bright lights of Saigon winking in the dusk ahead.

Saigon, with Cho'lon, its Chinese suburb, is the commercial capital of Indo-China, its largest and liveliest city. Big liners can steam the forty-five miles upriver and hitch onto the municipal trees. In importance it ranks as the third port under the French flag, coming after Marseilles and Le Havre. The river presents no difficulties; nevertheless the services of expensive pilots are compulsory. Shortly before I arrived these gentlemen, not content with something for nothing, went on strike for more, with the result that exasperated ship-masters took the law into their own hands and did without them. Nor was there a single mishap. The absurdity of the situation lies in the fact that though a master is compelled to hand the working of his ship over to a pilot he remains responsible for her. A man I knew had to take a pilot up another Eastern river. The fellow came aboard so drunk he either saw no leading lights at all or too many and made a sporting attempt to take the steamer into port by an overland route across some miles of paddy. The captain put him to sleep with an uppercut on the jaw and took the ship himself—but had to pay the fees all the same. As he told me himself, "I wouldn't so much mind paying pilot dues, provided the pilots would stop ashore."

The staple export of Cochin-China is rice, rice again, and yet more rice. The country for fifty miles about



Saigon is as flat as a tennis-court, only a few feet above water and devoid of interest as a boot-tree of foliage, but the city itself is most attractive, well-lit, well-built, laid out in spacious boulevards and parks and plentifully supplied with lordly shade-trees, especially in the quarter where the military hospitals and barracks are located. Pleasant, also, is the Quai Primauguet, with its government buildings gleaming white and cool behind barriers of poinsettia and scarlet fire-plant.

During the intense, crumpling heat of midday Saigon



A Saigon "Matchbox."

is dead to the world, but towards evening the fine shops reopen and the fashionable thing to do is to drive out over the Arroyo Chinois to the Nouveau Port and there sit and drink the sea-breeze and eat peanuts. Isolate a Jew in the middle of the Sahara and he will open a pawn-shop and start business by hocking his own suspenders; a Scot and he'll found a Burns Society of one: a Frenchman and he'll open a café for somewhere to sit of an evening and meet himself sociably. With the fall of night all Saigon turns caféward as the True Believer turns to Mecca, to sit under the awnings



of Rue Catinat, smoke Maryland cigarettes and make one *vermouth cassis* last two hours. It is an animated scene, the brilliant electric lights glowing against the warm blue dusk, the motor head-lights sweeping up hill and down, the orchestras playing, the crowded tables. Except that most of the men are in white it might be Marseilles—or Paris.

A stroll through the huge covered market is well worth doing, if your nose is not too nice. Everything necessary to Oriental life is there. Crates of smelly fish, alongside baskets of gorgeous flowers, both real and artificial. Meat-stalls, stalls of cheap garments, wooden clogs, red lacquer boxes, balloons, brightly painted scrolls, paper lanterns, rosettes and streamers. There are ambulatory restaurants for the hungry, children bearing trays of red watermelon slices for the thirsty. Chinese do most of the business. When heated they draw buckets of water and empty them over themselves and return to work dripping like seals. As they wear no clothing but a pair of football shorts there is no great sartorial damage done. When business is slack they curl up and sleep instantly, like the dead, oblivious to the high-pitched clamour. I saw one merchant stretched out on his stall, his head on a stack of great white radishes, his feet on a pile of melons. Another was using a large and slimy fish for pillow.

Saigon possesses a most interesting Zoo set in a pleasant garden beside the Arroyo de l'Avalanche and containing what must surely be the largest monkey-cage in the world. I was there one Sunday afternoon and the black and grey acrobats were stuffing themselves to bursting-point with the peanuts and bananas of an admiring concourse, greatly to the exasperation of a single wild monkey on the outside. The poor chap's efforts to squeeze through the bars and join the



idle rich were truly pathetic. If the monkey struggled to get in, the baby elephant had to exercise great restraint to avoid falling out. People were feeding her with bananas too, but she was not very adroit in catching them and some fell beyond her reach. The bars of her pen were so high from the ground that by stooping she could easily have walked out underneath and retrieved those bananas. But she did not. She leaned her forehead against the bars and pretended she could get no lower. I imagine her mamma (present) had said to her, "You may be small as yet, my child, but remember you are, after all, an *elephant*. Try to behave as such." She did.

The only other features that I can recollect about Saigon are its cathedral, which must be the ugliest in Christendom, and a film exhibited in the Eden Cinema. "*Le Marchande de Venise*." I read: "*Production artistique du celebre auteur anglais, William Shakespeare*. "Celebrated" is good. We shall be hearing next of "the well-known divinity, God."

In Saigon I caught up with my trunk, which had been forwarded by coast-steamer from Haiphong three months before. I opened it. On top lay my dress clothes, packed at the last moment by the Tonkinese tailor who had had the pressing of them. Carelessly I took them out—then noticed the trousers had but a single tape stripe down the leg. I scratched my head. "Surely," I mused, "my trousers had double stripes? They can't have fallen off!" With a chill feeling creeping up my spine, I examined the jacket. A barely legible label divulged that it had been constructed in Amsterdam—nothing more.

I tried on those clothes. The trouser-bottoms did not reach my ankles, but what they lacked in length they made up in volume—I could tuck the waist up in a



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



bunch and fold it round me. There was room for three of me inside the waistcoat. As for the jacket—imagine the mantle of Mr. G. K. Chesterton descending upon Mr. G. Bernard Shaw. The chill feeling spread all over me. Here was I thousands of miles from my tailor without a dress suit—or rather, much too much of one. There would be dinner parties here and there and I should be going home on a boat where they dressed every night. I should have to go and live with the stokers! From merely chilly I turned to solid ice. Could I have met with that muddle-headed Tonkinese at that moment I would have cut his throat and drunk his blood.

Then something made me look at the pier-glass and what I like to call my sense of humour came to the rescue. I laughed till I ached. I grabbed the 'phone and called up a friend. "For the love of Mike, come quick!" I implored. "And bring any friends you like, bring the whole town!" He laughed till he was sick.

Cables to Haiphong brought no word of the other victim. There had been a Dutchman staying at the hotel, they replied, but he had left for the Philippines on the day I myself departed. I used to picture a squat, obese Hollander speeding over land and sea all unconscious of the surprise lurking in his luggage. Then one evening—in Java, perhaps, Sumatra, or back in dear old Amsterdam—going up to dress for dinner and—!!! The thought was balm to my soul, for if one is to be made to look a perfect fool it's nice to have company.

Van Heemskirk, white as paper, the rags of his proper self, lay on a long chair. At one end of the verandah was a bed with a Spanish missionary in it, still as death, his beard lying black and sweat-draggled



on the sheet. At the other end was a second bed with an orb of red poll, like a rising sun, showing above the pillow. A sister-of-mercy, a sturdy middle-aged French woman of the peasant class, approached Van Heemskirk, tumbler in hand. "*Eh bien, monsieur, c'est l'heure d'apertif. Je vous ai apporté votre p'tite goutte de . . . d'Amer Picon.*" She chuckled and her wholesome face in its white frame looked like a russet apple. Heemskirk swallowed the disgusting stuff and coughed his thanks. The sister glanced at the deathly priest and at the red-head, then stalked the latter on tiptoe. "*C'est bien, il vraiment dort, le méchant,*" she whispered and stole away.

"Makes the same old joke about the dog-gone *apertif* every evening," said Heemskirk. "All the same, she's a dear, that woman. Been thirty years in this blasted country and not a day's leave. When she goes home it'll be to the long one. Her religion don't allow her a blessed thing she can call her own, not even a dog. I'm not strong on saints as a rule, but there's one of 'em."

"I expect you blokes here supply all the trouble an ordinary woman would get from children or dogs," said I.

He nodded. "You bet. That priest is bad, been too long up-country. In and out of delirium all the time. No matter when he starts the racket she gets to him. I'm darned if I know when she sleeps. He's in the next room to me. I hear his teeth begin to click and the next moment she's there, hanging on to his hand, hauling him back out of hell. Treats him like a child. Hums nursery rhymes to him.

'Sur le pont

D'Avignon

Tout le monde se danse . . . !



Then he quiets down. I hear it all, through the partition. Then there's that *méchant* countryman of yours." He indicated the red-head. "Mate of a China boat, landed here half-dead. Soon as the cuss could raise a leg, what do you think he starts doing? Why, shadow-sparring. Says he's in for the welterweight championship of Hongkong and must get fit. He slips out of bed, swings with his right, hooks with his left and then, of course, his legs give way and he knocks himself out against the floor. She's got to watch him like a cat. If he gets half a chance he hops out and starts his fool tricks. He'll kill himself getting fit. Children! You said it."

"You've left yourself out," said I. "What's your little stunt?"

"Nothing now. I'm better, but a week ago— Oh, well, leave it at that, I want to forget it."

The last stains of sunset faded out of the sky, dusk filled the hospital garden. About the eaves bats looped and swooped as though engaged in an aërial dance. Then suddenly from the park opposite came a tremendous roar, shattering the evening peace like a bombshell and dying away in a long-drawn, despairing howl.

The red-head lifted from the pillows and dropped back again, the priest stirred and muttered in his exhausted sleep.

"'Tiger, tiger burning bright,'" said Heemskirk. "He goes off like that in the middle of the night, sometimes. Wakes you up shaking."

"It's that new chap lately brought down from Laos," I said. "Homesick, poor brute! He'll quiet down in time."

Heemskirk shook his head. "I doubt it. That jungle sort are best left in their jungle."



He lay back watching the stars prick out in the deep lilac sky.

"Looks like a Christmas-tree, that cassia, eh?—with stars for candles at the tip of each bough." Then, abruptly: "You were in Yunnan-Fu. Did you ever go out to the Copper Pagoda?"

"Yes. Along miles of broken embankments, and over some red hills that looked as though they had been wrenched open."

Heemskirk nodded. "That's it. I was stationed in Yunnan-Fu once, y'know. I lived in an old Chinese house inside the walls, off the Tong-Men. It was far too big for me, but decent houses were scarce. Then I met a Frenchman in the club one night. He was just up from Phong Saly and had to dig in somewhere. He was a roughish sort, but I needed some one to share expenses, so I agreed to let him have half my house and he moved in right away, together with a Laotian woman he had brought with him. I hadn't bargained for that, but East is East, the house was big and I hardly saw her. We lived like that for a year, quite comfortably. Maréchal, the Frenchman, was a noisy big animal with a temper like greased thunderbolts, but a real kind heart—he'd give you the shirt off his back and toss his socks after it. You couldn't help liking him. The woman had been with him for years and was a fine upstanding creature like all those Laotians, but she was getting on a bit. But, as I said, you hardly ever saw her and never heard her; for all her weight, she went like a cat, barefooted. The most I ever seemed to see was a shadow slipping along a wall, out of the way.

"Then one day we had an addition, a Yunnanese girl this time. Maréchal found her in the gutter, pounded black and blue. Her master had given her a thrashing,



not because she had done anything but because he wanted an outlet for his rage. The Chinks are like that. A mandarin fines 'em for something, they bow and smirk and then go home and take it out of something that can't hit back. Anyhow Maréchal happened to be in one of his generous moods, so he lifted her into his chair, brought her home and had her seen to, and a poor little scared scarecrow of dirt, bones and bruises, it was.

"Of course you can't march off with a Chink's property like that. Within an hour her master was round, raising Sam Hill. We had a great scene, the Cantonese whining and threatening, Maréchal daring him to touch the girl, roaring like a bull. I thought the roof would come off. But the Cantonese had the law on his side and in the end Maréchal bought the girl out. My Chinese compradore told me the Cantonese made nine hundred per cent on the deal and warned us that we should have every disreputable in Yunnan outside the door walloping blazes out of his slaves. But, fortunately, the commercial possibilities of working on Maréchal's feelings didn't spread any and we were spared.

"The second girl was no more trouble than the first, like a little mouse. Maréchal gave her smart clothes and a few trinkets to doll herself out with—and then forgot all about her. Her bruises faded away and she began to fill out on the lavish food. On what few occasions I did see her it struck me she was developing into something remarkably easy to look at. Everything went on smooth and quiet for eight months, then Maréchal went down to Mong-Tseu for a couple of weeks on business, taking the Laotian with him. On the evening he was due back I came home and, fumbling up the dark stairs, bumped my head into something.



It was the Chinese girl dangling over the banisters, stone dead. She had hanged herself.

"Maréchal was appalled. He raved, he tore his hair, then went to pieces and wept like a child. What had gone wrong? What? What? He had rescued her from brutality and want and set her up in luxury, yet she had found it worse than the first even, unendurable. Why? Why? He could not sleep; that still little figure lying in the next room haunted him. What had he done? At two in the morning he woke me up to tell me he had got to the bottom of it. The girl was madly in love with him and had killed herself for love. His Provencal imagination leapt at the idea, made of it a great passionate tragedy and wallowed in it—but his distress was genuine enough and he showed himself no mercy: it was all his fault, he should have seen . . . shown some little tenderness. . . .

"I could have told him the truth—but I dared not.

"Then he got the notion into his emotional head that she must have Christian burial. Personally I don't give a damn about that sort of thing, but there were some odd survivals of religious upbringing still knocking about in Maréchal's skull and he was convinced that if she were buried in consecrated ground she'd go to Heaven. He went off and interviewed the missionaries; they were sympathetic, but turned him down, saying, reasonably enough, that the girl wasn't a Christian. I supposed then that Maréchal would give up; but no—he buried her himself, out on those red hills. I went along because I was a friend of Maréchal and because I felt sick as mud—poor little kid!

"Strangest funeral I ever attended. Gang of coolies padding along with the big yellow coffin, then Maréchal, then myself. I rode, but Maréchal walked every step of the way, bareheaded in the blazing heat



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



—form of penance, I presume. It is a miracle he didn't drop of sunstroke. Across the plain we went, along those miles of paved embankments, through the staring villages and up into the hills, a queer procession. We got ready to lower the coffin. 'Wait a moment,' said Maréchal, and taking a bottle out of his pocket sprinkled some drops into the grave. 'It's holy water,' he said, with a sort of childish cunning; 'I got it out of the *bénitier* in the mission. This is holy ground *now*.' After that, Maréchal having forgotten to borrow a book and neither of us remembering any prayers, we went home. A rum show."

Van Heemskirk paused. The sky had deepened from lilac to dark blue. The cassia-tree glimmered with celestial tinsel. A monkey in the park sent up a long wavering cry, and from the Arroyo de l'Avalanche arose the throbbing chorus of bull-frogs.

"You said that you could have told Maréchal the truth," said I. "What was it?"

"The Laotian woman killed the girl."

"But she was away at—"

"Yes, I know she was away—but she was coming back that evening. She was past her prime, the girl on the bloom. She saw herself supplanted before long, so she took steps. She told the girl to kill herself, went on telling her day and night. It was quite easy; the girl had been a slave too long, had no mind of her own, she did as she was told."

"Did you tell Maréchal?"

"No, there would have been a second murder and what good would that have done? Moreover, the woman wasn't to blame; she merely acted according to her nature. The fault was Maréchal's; he should have left that tigress in her jungle."

CHAPTER XVIII

NORTHWARD

From Saigon I travelled to Phnom-Penh by steamer, up the Mekhong, that great river of Indo-China which has its source up among the lamas in Thibet, forms the boundary between Siam and Laos, irrigates the country, serves as a national highway, nourishes crocodiles thirty feet long and does all manner of useful jobs before emptying into the China Sea through no less than nine mouths.

It was on the day following Chinese New Year when I left and nine at night. Celebrations were still in progress. Stokers on the berthed steamers were letting off slap-bangs; crackers popped all over the town. First one or two, desultory sniping, then fusillade upon fusillade. Saigon might have been a beleaguered city. The Chinese saluted the new moon with rockets, she lying on her back, low down over the glare of the town like some wan and listless goddess. The rockets soared and drooped, fiery daffodils curving gracefully across the stars.

We left the brightly lit cafés astern and headed seawards to find the main stream of the Mekhong. On the lower deck men and women were laying out their mats for the night, among stacks of green cokernuts, crates of hens, bales and baskets. Lower still, a naked Malay cast logs into the furnaces. In the glow of the flames his wet body shone red. Down in that flame-lit pit he seemed a devil stoking fires for the damned.



My cabin fan had broken down, so I camped in a long chair on deck for the night.

We ran on and on through the flat dark country. The native steersmen must have had eyes like cats, for mine are good enough, yet the river-banks were invisible to me. Stars bent in a bright arch from low horizon to low horizon; we might have been at sea. Occasionally the glow of a cigar and a ghostly shape on the bridge betokened that the captain (in pyjamas) had risen from bed to see his charge round a corner. The last things I remember that night were the Cross very faint in the south, the Dipper tilted over Siam, and Orion twinkling brightly down on me through a split in the awning.

I spent the next sweltering day in pyjamas, walking in and out of the shower-bath. Pyjamas constituted the captain's only wear, also. He was the sole white member of the crew and never left the bridge, sleeping, eating and having his being in the wheel-house. The native steward, having only me to wait on, lay on his back all day in the shade of the deck-house and read a book with much expression and at the top of his voice. It sounded a most exciting work, composed almost entirely of ejaculations. "Ah-ha!" I would hear from the other side of the deck-house. "Ah! Oh! Ai-ee! Ooh! Oo-ah!" Then a short gabbled sentence followed by another burst of *Oo-ahs* and *Ai-ees*. A book of that sort should be easy to write. I must try one myself one day, when I've saved up a stock of exclamation-marks.

All day we pushed against the broad flood, through a land so flat and along banks so low it seems as though a six-foot tidal-wave would drown the whole country. Here and there along the banks were fish-traps, canoes drawn up, thatched roofs showing among bamboos and



kapoks, and perhaps a buffalo cooling its ugly hide in the stream, nostrils alone visible. Freight-junks drifted down under idle sails, also mats of floating weed with mauve flowers. Now and again canoes accosted us and passengers, mainly women, came aboard haling their luggage with them, mat bundles, boxes, and live hens either crushed into baskets like cabbages or tied up in bouquets by the legs. In Indo-China nobody seems to



Passengers.

be able to step across the road without taking his hen with him. As there is little camaraderie in a hen and there can be no market for so common an article, I presume the idea is that travel will enlarge its mind.

Sunset turned the sky into one great flawless fire opal, night came over the wide savannahs wearing the young moon like a jewel, but bringing little respite from the heat. I spent a second night in the long



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



chair, waking to see the gilt horns of Phnom-Penh's pagodas lifting over the tree-tops, flashing back at the new-risen sun. It was as though a herd of golden bulls stood at rest in a magic wood.

Phnom-Penh is the capital of Cambodia and may be pronounced simply "Nom-Pen" without any nasal dislocation, two h's and one p, like good children of the Victorian Era, being seen but not heard. The population seems to consist mainly of Chinese (there are 20,000 of these) and *bonzes*, ranging in age from nine to ninety. In no one place, except perhaps Rome and Maynooth, have I seen so many priests, but they greatly enhance the local colour. As prescribed by Buddha the *pra* must wear nothing but yellow. Three yellow robes is he allowed and he must wear them all at once. He must also shave his head completely, even his eyebrows. He must beg for his living and when he has scratched together sufficient for the day spend the rest of it sunk in the Five Meditations. The things he must *not* do are legion. Here are a few: Inhale flowers. Listen to music. Whistle. Swing the arms when walking. Stretch the legs when sitting. Put flowers in the ears. Ride on an elephant. Make gifts to a woman. Eat seeds. Wash in the dark. Wink. On his walks abroad he must carry a large fan to screen his eyes from unseemly spectacles or tempting sights, such as women. He must fix his gaze on the ground and not look more than a plough's length ahead of him.

Hardly an attractive vocation, according to the book, but every mother's son must enter the Church for at least three months of his life, so the ministry is well maintained. Furthermore, my Lord Buddha has been dead some years, the regulations have slacked off a bit. The priest still shaves and wears yellow.



The fan goes with him—to keep flies off. As for never looking up off the ground, my recollection of Cambodia (and indeed of Siam also) is that whenever there was any fun toward, from a kite-match to a dog-fight, you could hardly get near for mustard-coloured *pras*. I have also a memory of three young *nones*, eyes gummed to the penny peep-shows in the Phnom-Penh arcades, cranking away for dear life.

The palace of the Cambodian monarchs is a modern concrete and stucco affair which reminded me of certain Oriental exhibitions I have visited in Europe, except that it is not so Oriental. To heighten the similarity is a very French sheet-iron maisonette left over from the Paris exhibition of 1878 and presented to the late King Norodom. One expects to see "*Mon repos*" or "*Les hirondelles*" painted on the door; but, no, the rococo sardine-tin is styled "*Le palais de fer*."

The Audience building is large and contains two adjacent thrones. On one sits a gilded statue of the reigning monarch, Sisowath; on the other King Sisowath himself sits and reigns during reigning hours. In a semicircle behind the thrones are five large mirrors, so that, during an audience, one is almost surrounded by King Sisowaths, real, counterfeit and reflected, all reigning at once—a somewhat overwhelming spectacle.

I was shown the big covered stage whereon the celebrated royal dancing girls give their performances; and led into a house where two aged *Bakous* (descendants of the Brahmins) guard the regalia. They were not guarding them very vigilantly that afternoon, being both fast asleep. My guide, a treasury official, stirred them up with his foot. For ten cents one produced the crown of Cambodia, a conical affair of fretted gold, very heavy to the head, and for a like sum his mate disclosed a short sword with a richly chased blade



and a ruby-encrusted hilt. This, I learned, was the "Prah-Khan," the palladium of the realm, presented to Sisowath's ancestors by the God of Heaven, Indra himself. It was the first and only time I have seen any tangible object guaranteed direct from Heaven and was most interested.

The *pièce de résistance* of the Palace is the Silver Pagoda, built by Norodom. It stands in a courtyard surrounded by cloisters, on the walls of which are illustrations of the Hindu epic poem, the Râmâyana. Here is the whole story of Râma, his incarnation and childhood, his marriage with Sita, his exile in the forests of Daudaka, his alliance with the monkey king, his rescue of Sita, his life at Ayodhya and his ascent to Heaven. The frescoes run all round the huge court; the work is immense—there must be a quarter of a mile of landscape and tens of thousands of little figures, all painted with exceeding spirit and humour.

The pagoda gets its name from the floor which is paved with silver tiles. Its chief treasures are an "emerald" Buddha (which is not emerald at all but imperial jadite) and a gold Buddha. The latter is life-sized, has large diamonds in the palms of its hands, diamonds for eyes, and a diamond in the centre of its forehead. The treasury official, who ought to know, told me that six hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold went into the pot. A pious and costly offering. Let us hope that King Norodom, in Heaven, is reaping the interest.

But of all the royal *lares* which appealed most to my impious fancy was an object preserved in a glass case in the Treasury—an ordinary, everyday, black felt bowler hat, its decorum relieved by a cut-glass door-knob screwed into the crown.

I struck Phnom-Penh during the hottest season



within memory. It was enough to make one speak respectfully of Hell. Natives dropped down in the street and died; the French came out only by night to lounge, more dead than alive, in the Phnom gardens or gasp for air on the river-front. One had to ride one's body with whip and spurs to get it to move. The only creatures who seemed to be enjoying themselves were the giant cockroaches whose bedroom I shared. I was in Phnom-Penh, perforce, three days and nights and disliked it increasingly with every hour.

Nevertheless, it possesses one oasis, one unique and grateful spot, the Khmer Museum. This is under the loving care of M. George Groslier, probably the greatest living authority on Angkor and to whom the revival of native handicrafts is largely due. The collection is housed in a building of Cambodian style, with the roof turned up at the ends in the form of an inverted arc and tipped with horns. Here are Brahmanic and Buddhist statues, bas-reliefs and ornaments of many epochs, fetched from many places, Angkor, Sambor, Phnom-Kulen, Kompong Speu. Sivaist trinities in stone, Khmer lions, Garudas and Nagas, Buddhas and Taras. Here are scores of little bronze images, monks, sacred dancers, chariot buckles, bells, daggers, beaten silver cups, and rings with enormous jewels. Here also are glittering dresses, ferocious fanged masks with crowns like spires for actors, silks of barbaric but entrancing colours, pots and jars of earthenware, black lacquer boxes shaped like toads, royal palanquins and saddlery.

A young Frenchman of the Direction sat at a table, writing. I started to ask him a question, then bit it off short, seeing him busy. But he was at my side in an instant, courtesy itself.



"I'm a bit confused—what were these Khmers?" I asked. "Brahminists or Buddhists?"

"Brahminists first and Buddhists later," said he. "At one time the two cults existed side by side. Then the latter absorbed the former and many of their idols with them, as the Christians absorbed the pagans and much of their ritual. The famous iron statue of St. Peter's, Rome, started life as the heathen god, Jupiter, in the Pantheon. The Christians placed a halo on his head, changed his name to Peter and kissed his toe off. In the west portico of Angkor Vat you will see a big Brahmanic god sniffing joss-sticks lit by pious, but mistaken, Buddhists. The same thing."

"How they must smile to themselves, these images," said I.

He grinned. "Yes; I often think that in the depths of the night, when I have gone home, this museum must ring with ironic laughter. But come here." He pointed to a tall statue. "What do you make of this?"

"Well—since you ask me, Egyptian," I hazarded, in my ignorance.

He was kind. "You are right, in a way—the square shoulders. But he's got his weight on one leg, the hip thrown up. No Egyptian carved that."

"Who, then?"

"Greek. Look at the spring of his back, the moulding of his shoulder-blades. Feel his feet! Run your fingers over the toe-joints; you can feel the bones under the skin. In my opinion, he's Greek—adapted."

"But how did he get here?"

"By sea. Why not? Vasco da Gama didn't originate sea-traffic in the East. For centuries before his galleons came, the North China junks had been meeting and trading with the Red Sea dhows at Malacca, the 'Golden Chersonese.' The highway flowed past



the mouths of the Mekhong, the gate of Angkor. Do you suppose the fame of great patrons of art, the Khmer kings (and the greatest of them died only in 908 A.D., remember) would not have attracted craftsmen and *objets d'art* of all nations? I think so."

"Then this fellow—?"

"May have been a Greek god once, dug out of the rubble of some plundered city—Troy, Syracuse—at some sailor's fancy, set up in his garden in Alexandria, suffering vicissitude on vicissitude, finally coming East in the ballast of a ship—"

"To be a god again."

"Yes, a Brahmanic god." He shrugged his shoulders. "But that is only my guess. Our work here is only guessing and piecing together. We may know something—some day."

From statue to bas-relief he went, bidding me examine that, feel this. He purred and glowed over his charges, that young man—and with the mercury boiling out of the thermometer. A scholar and a visionary. I liked and admired him with all my heart. I asked him if he had seen the Cham sculptures at Tourane. They could carve too. There was a goddess dancing between two geese holding lotus buds. The audacious poise of her, the swing of her hips. . . ! I enlarged on the goddess.

Gently he took me by the coat-lapel, cutting my effusion short.

"Come here." He led me to a block of stone containing a little lady in a flowery bower. She was charming, a curly-headed darling, smiling openly upon all men. Necklaces of pearl, amulets and bracelets hung from her rounded throat and arms. The stone flowered round her, delicate leaves and buds curling and opening.

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

"Where is your Cham goddess now? And look at this little head. Broken, of course, one ear missing, *mais—*"

It was a lovely little head, full of nostril, wide of brow, rounded of chin, inscrutably smiling, a *Giaconda* in stone. He touched her cheek, a caress, no less. "*Moi, je l'aime bien,*" he said, almost to himself. "*Je la trouve bien jolie.*"

He glanced up, grinning, rather ashamed of his passion.

"They stole her once," he said. "We found her in a sampan going downriver."

I had a vision of that young man going to the rescue of his little dear and felt sorry for the thief.

"Dirty trick!" I murmured, somewhat weakly, for at that very moment I had been considering—purely aimlessly, of course—the feasibility of stealing her myself.

The best way to Angkor is by steamer which leaves the Mekhong at Phnom-Penh, turns into the Tonlé Sap, crosses the Great Lake and sets the traveller ashore within a few miles of the ruins. The Tonlé Sap flows in opposite directions at different seasons. During the rains it flows north into the Great Lake, flooding the banks and inundating whole forests; I am told that during the floods junks feel their way into Siem Reap over the tree-tops. When the dry season sets in, the river flows south, emptying the lake, so that this inland sea (it is sixty-eight miles long) forms a huge reservoir for the country and is, moreover, one of the most prolific fishing-grounds in the world.

When I set out for Angkor the dry season was on and I had to go overland and am, alas! unable to boast that I have floated over tree-tops. I went north in a



brand-new mail bus carrying first-class passengers only. My white companion was a nervous French youth bound back to his station in the hinterlands, our driver a smiling Filipino. We ran out of Phnom-Penh just as the keeper was snuffing the candle in King Norodom's fanciful lighthouse and for the next hour or so my hair stood so continuously on end that I feared it would stop there. We had halted at an outlying hamlet to shed a postcard when, with a roar and a derisive fanfare of the horn, a third-class bus charged past, enveloping us in dust—closely followed by a second.

Our driver wiped the grit from his eyes and the smile from his face and muttering what I took to be Filipino expletives, advanced his spark and trod on the juice. * * * * * !! The idea of common third-class rattle-traps casting dust in the teeth of his first-class mail-carrier! * * * * * !! He'd show 'em! We tore in pursuit, plunged into a swirling dust-storm, saw a shadowy vehicle rocking madly ahead of us, closed on it, raced it wing to wing, two wheels in the gutter, two wheels skimming the abyss, saw the big thing loom over us like an exaggerated turkey-crate—native passengers' heads sticking out of every crack, all yelling at once—then with a bound that flung one backwards against the cushions, we had scraped past and were tearing up on the heels of the next, blinded and choked with dust.

Not once did this happen, but half a dozen times. Half a dozen times we were forced to stop and deliver mails and each time did those cursed third-classes catch us up and have to be repassed. The road was highly embanked, the merest touch, the slightest contact would have sent us somersaulting into space. That was my sole consolation. "At any rate," said I to myself, "if



anything happens I shan't know what. Just 'click'—and I'll wake up with a harp in my hands." I don't pretend I wasn't scared—my first action on reaching Kompong Thom was to find a mirror and examine my hair to see if it had turned white—but a few years of the Western Front teaches a certain philosophy. As for the French youth, he must have had a chameleon in his ancestry, so rapidly did he change colour from sickly yellow to mouldy green. However the Tonlé Sap brought the wild contest to a close, the mail demonstrating its superiority by reaching the ferry first.

Houses built on piles lined each side of the village street. Brown men wearing caps of red and green velvet and vivid sarongs in place of trousers, lounged in picturesque indolence on the river-bank. The Frenchman woke out of uneasy reveries to tell me that they were Malays and that they lived there for the fishing. Each high-perched dwelling had its chocolate babies, its bobtailed cat and a pet of some kind, a green paroquet or a mandarin blackbird in a bamboo cage. At the back of one house a tame crane stood in a puddle, prodding the mud for worms. Behind another house was a piebald pig moored to a large stone by means of a cable tied round its tummy. I had never before seen a pig riding at anchor, but it seemed a cheap and practical method of restricting its peregrinations. I commend the dodge to hog-fanciers.

On the verandah of yet another house squatted a brown monkey and a brown infant of about the same size, the latter sucking green corn, the former watching him with liquid envious eyes. The monkey whined and whimpered and patted the child's arm imploringly. The baby gave it a cob and they sat side by side in brotherly love, gnawing at the corn. It was a picture that would have delighted the Darwinites—and been



burnt by the public executioner in Dayton, Tennessee.

We crossed the river and went racing away across a flat, bare country, baked dry as a brick. The sun rose up in pitiless strength, the road before us became a ribbon of dazzling white, that behind us was hidden in a hanging dust-cloud. Heat haze simmered over the face of the land, trees quivered; outlines vibrated and multiplied; the horizon rippled as though swept by encroaching seas. Seen through that trembling haze the world appeared unstable and illusionary, one vast mirage which might at any moment utterly dissolve.

We ran into belts of timber, stopping here and there to drop a letter or a newspaper for some solitary *fonctionnaire*. Now and again we met parties of natives, brown folk, better built than Annamites and bearing themselves with the upright grace of people accustomed to carry weights not on a pole but on their heads.

In one place, out in the midst of the arid flats, I saw a bush covered with snow. I came to the conclusion that it could not be snow, but some shining white blossom, like hawthorne or may. Then, as I looked, the blossom took unto itself wings and went fluttering up into the blue in a whirl of silver flakes as though a sudden gust had stripped the tree—and behold it was nothing more or less than a flock of egrets.

We lunched at Kompong Thom, a string of Chinese stores beside a shrunken river, and sped on again across the burning wastes. A few advocate birds, pens at ear, patrolled the middle distance, meditating profoundly on nothing. We passed scattered spider-legged farms—and a canoe. A taxicab in mid-Atlantic could not have been more astonishing. I said as much to the French lad, who started out of his glazed trance to say first, "*Ah oui*," and then, "*Mais non*." When the



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



rains fell they would have a use for that canoe. When the Mekhong came down in flood, forcing the Tonlé Sap backwards, the whole country went under water, to emerge green with rice. During the wet season the houses were just so many little islands. That said, he relapsed into silence. He seemed scared of me; in fact, of everything. We halted at a wooden bungalow and the boy got out, dragging his battered bag with him.

"Live near here?" I enquired.

"Here, in that house."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

I looked at the bungalow. It had a dilapidated appearance. The forest pressed dark and silent upon its rear. A lonely spot of a night, I should say. No wonder the boy's eyes looked queer.

"I lived alone once, in the African bush," I said.

"You?"

"Yes, for three years."

He gave me one of his quick, furtive glances and stuttered: "Then you . . . you understand."

I nodded. "Do any sewing?"

"Sewing? Me?"

"Yes, you. I knew a chap in Africa who was sent to an out-station a month's trek from anywhere during six months of the year and entirely cut off during the remainder. His two predecessors shot themselves, the first because the silence was so intense he began to hear things, the second because he got sick and tired of his own conversation. The third man went out, stayed his time and came back sane as a door-knob. He spent his evenings sewing, embroidering parrots. Saw a girl in Mafeking stitching a parrot on a tea-cosy and it occurred to him that it would be something to occupy



his mind, so he took along some stuff and turned out hundreds of parrots such as were never seen in this world or the next, parrots flying and parrots sitting, parrots billing and parrots cooing—he said he got absolutely absorbed in inventing new combinations. Sounds silly, don't it?—but it worked.” I climbed back into the car. “Think it over,” I said. “Parrots—but of course higher mathematics or fretwork would do as well. Good-bye!”

Two hundred yards further on I glanced back; the boy was still standing where we left him, staring after the car.

We plunged into forests and raced on, hour upon hour. The riven air, sucked in behind the windscreen, was a red-hot blast, scorching the skin. In one place the timber was afire, crackling like distant musketry, sweeping the road with dense and choking clouds, but the Filipino plunged into them without falter, his merry eyes impervious to smoke, dust or dazzle. On and on down long forest avenues we swept, swung hard over to the left and came to a halt beside a gentle river flowing through a green tunnel of gracious trees. Bamboo water-wheels turned in the slow current; women stood knee-deep in the stream washing bright-coloured clothing. In the gardens were little white bungalows brilliant in their mantles of Bougainvillea. After the heat and aching glare of the plains it seemed a corner of paradise. This was Siem Reap, residence of the Cambodian provincial governor.

Half an hour and we were away again, racing down more jungle roads. But journey's end was near. The Filipino nudged my elbow and pointed. I caught my breath. Far ahead the five great lotus-bud towers of Angkor Vat soared triumphantly above the tree-tops, rosy in the evening sky.

CHAPTER XIX

ANGKOR

There are people who speak of the ancient Khmers as though they were a race of demigods who appeared out of some mysterious background, took possession of Cambodia and, having built marvelously, vanished whence they had come. The idea is poetical, but its colours run in the washtub. The Khmers of yesterday were the same breed as the Cambodians of to-day. Under the sway of inspired kings they rose to great wealth and power. The strong dynasty petered out, vengeful enemies closed in upon them, devastating the land, and the jungle swept a veil over what was left. Burial-places have ever been a fruitful source of information to the archæologist, but the Khmers burnt their dead. If they had any literature it was inscribed on talipot-leaf, no trace of which remains. All that is left to tell of a puissant and artistic people are the bas-reliefs, a few stone tablets engraved in Sanscrit, and the writings of a Chinaman—*Sic transit gloria mundi!*

The first Khmer monarch mentioned on the tablets is Crutavarman, who is supposed to have reigned at not until some three centuries later that Angkor was the commencement of the sixth century A.D., but it was settled on as the capital. The Khmer kings shifted their headquarters to suit the needs of the hour, on the heels of their conquering armies. Cresthavarman, son of Crutavarman, established himself in the far north, in what is now Laos. Icanavarman kept house on the borders of Cochin-China. According to Chi-



nese accounts, his chief city, Vyadhapura, contained more than twenty thousand families. Jayavarman II, a contemporary of Charlemagne, inhabited no less than four capitals. Though this vagrant monarch built the first of the Angkor monuments, Prah-Khan, it was Yacovarman who founded the royal city and made it one of the wonders of Asia. The kingdom had now reached its greatest proportions, stretching from the Annamite Chain on the east to the present Siamese border, from the Dangrex Range southwards to the Gulf of Siam and the China Sea.

The reasons for the choice of Angkor for the new metropolis are obvious; it was more or less the strategic centre and there was the Tonlé Sap with its unlimited supplies of fish for the pot and water for the rice-fields—it supports a fishing population of thirty thousand to this day.

The site determined on, Yacovarman set to work with unbounded vision and energy, building magnificent temples and palaces, laying out huge systems of irrigation and defence. His conquests had brought him ample slave labour; nevertheless, the problem of feeding that army of workmen, maintaining roads—all the stone had to be dragged a distance of twenty miles—and directing the colossal, widespread work must have been enormous. In the twenty-eight years of his reign he built “the impregnable, terrifying” city of Yacodharapura and surrounded it with a wall over twelve kilometres in circumference—or nearly twice that of Carthage under the Romans—which in turn was protected by a deep moat stocked with ferocious crocodiles.

He built, among other things, that most original of all Khmer monuments, the Bayon; also Phnom Kantal and Tep Prenam, dug out the vast Eastern Reser-



voir, hove up dikes, and built roads and bridges galore. He also started on the Phimeanakas, "Aerial Palace," a job which he did not live to complete. Cri Yacovarman died in 908. For the originality of his designs and the grandeur of his achievements he must be acknowledged one of the master builders of all time.

Two successors—under, it is supposed, exigencies of warfare with the Chams—made Chok Gargyar their capital, seventy miles to the northeast, but in 944 the new king, Rajendravarman, returned to Angkor to increase and embellish it with statues, temples and palaces plated with gold and encrusted with precious stones.

His son, Jayavarman V, built the huge Baphuon—"Haimacringagiri," he called it, "The Mountain of the Golden Horn"; it is said to have borne a blazing brass cupola. He is also believed to have laid the foundations of the massive Takeo temple.

In 1112 came Suryavarman II; and while the five "Little Dynasties" were cowering from the Tartars in Nanking, St. Bernard preaching the second Crusade, the Plantagenets and York Minster rising simultaneously, the Guelphs and Ghibellines making nuisances of themselves in Italy, and Thomas à Becket getting canonised for having been one in England, Suryavarman II was quietly bringing forth that greatest and finest expression of Khmer genius, Angkor Vat. His successor, Jayavarman VII, continued the immense work, built the beautiful and simple Ta Prom and a few lesser monuments. Angkor was now at its apogee, a city of temples, monuments, palaces, canals and basins extending over an area of thirty square miles. Succeeding kings were to maintain it in good order, but there were to be no more buildings of any note.



In the year 1296 came one Tchu-Ta-Kuan from Peking, ambassador of the Mongol emperor, and he has left a memoir testifying to the immensity of the city and the magnificence of its court. "Everybody, beginning at the King, wears their shoulders bare," * he writes. "They simply twist a piece of cloth about themselves. Only the King may dress himself in close-fitting flowered material. He wears a gold diadem. . . . When not wearing the diadem he wears outside his chignon garlands of scented blossoms, like jasmine. Round his neck he hangs nearly three pounds of large pearls. On his wrists, ankles and fingers he wears bracelets and rings of gold set with cat's-eyes. He goes barefooted and the soles of his feet and the palms of his hands are stained red. When he goes abroad he carries a golden sword (the Prah-Khan). The highest dignitaries bear him in a palanquin with golden poles, under four parasols with handles of gold.

"When the King goes abroad, the cavalry ride at the head of the escort; then come the standards, the banners, music. The palace women to the number of three to five hundred, in flowered stuffs, flowers in their hair, carry in their hands tall tapers and form a troupe: even in broad daylight the tapers are lit. Then come palace women carrying the royal utensils of gold and silver and all sorts of ornaments, each of a different model and the uses of which are unknown to me. Then there are palace women carrying lance and buckler and who are the King's private guard. Follow goat carriages, horse carriages, all ornamented with gold. Ministers and princes are mounted on elephants . . . their red parasols are innumerable. After them come the King's wives and concubines, in

* From M. Pelliot's translation.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



palanquins, in carriages, on elephants. They have certainly more than a hundred parasols garnished with gold. Behind them comes the King on an elephant, carrying in his hand the precious sword. The elephant trappings are enveloped in gold. There are more than twenty white and gold parasols the handles of which are of gold. A number of elephants fence him about and the cavalry protects him. . . .”

But the King, *excalibur* in hand, his cavalry and war elephants, had been better employed out on these rough frontiers that his forbears had kept than parading in glittering pageants through applauding Angkor, for as the Chinese ambassador relates in an ominous finale, the enemy was even then at hand. The Siamese, lusting for vengeance, had broken the outer guards and were pouring over the country towards the golden capital. The enemy was at hand—that is the last record of imperial Angkor and its “god-kings.” Oriental wars meant extermination for the vanquished. “The sword without and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grey hairs.” The victors left nothing to breed from; if they could help it, there should be no “come back.”

The Siamese came and stormed “the impregnable, terrifying” walls—the rest is oblivion.

Tchu-Ta-Tuan testifies of Angkor in his day that “the stones are so solidly set together that a weed could not be found growing there.” Within a century the weeds were thrusting everywhere; within two the wonder city of Yacovarman the Great was dead, forgotten, covered up, sunk under the green waves of the jungle in an inundation as complete as that of lost Atlantis. The Portuguese who reached Malacca in 1509, Siam in 1511 and China in 1516, knew nothing of it,



though they heard rumors of a ruined city lying somewhere or other up in the wilds and ascribed it to the Romans! For centuries it lay there in gloom and silence, with the trees growing higher and the creepers wrapping closer, the monkeys making mock of the fallen gods, panthers dragging their meat through the Courts of Honour.

Then in 1850 came the first white man, Father Bouillevaux, a French missionary. Imagine it. Trudging mile upon mile through the silent, stifling jungle with no thought in one's head but the problems of the night's camp when suddenly there is a Brobdingnagian face, coarse lipped, tiara-crowned, staring through the crisscross of boughs forty feet above one! A startling and terrible sight! Odds and ends of myths and legends flash through the traveller's mind—the giant demons of the East—Asooras!

Then he notices that there is a wad of moss on the spreading nostril, a tendril of wild vine seals the contemptuous lips, and he gets a grip of his nerves—the face is of stone. A stone face set up there in the tangled solitude, hundreds of miles from anywhere! He blunders on. The stone face is but one of four, they crown an archway high enough for an elephant to pass through, howdah and all.

He pushes forward. Immense walls branch away into the forest on either hand. There are evidences of a moat. This is a causeway he is on, a causeway bordered with tumbled stone giants, fragments of a Naga in their arms; there must be a hundred of them. What is this he has stumbled across? A forsaken temple? An abandoned fortress? He crawls through the archway, over blocks of débris, thrashing the bushes aside. Birds fly out, bats squeak up in the vault. Something rustles in the scrub and a lithe form, striped



black and yellow, leaps through the striped shaft of sun and shadow. Tiger!—its kill is in the bushes yonder, a day old; there is a rancid smell of blood and gutted entrails.

The traveller presses on. What is this? A terrace carved with elephants, a procession of elephants, life-sized, hunters on their backs.* A roguish face smiles at him over a fan of leaves. He tears the creeper aside. It is a girl hung with ropes of pearls, dancing on a lotus-flower. There are tiers of smiling women, apple-breasted beauties with heavy earrings touching their smooth, bare shoulders, bracelets on their arms, jewels about their loins, princesses, queens, a gallery of queens!—but the ants have defiled them with their plasterings and the spiders veiled them with dingy webs.†

A cobra coils up in the weeds, its hood inflated. He hurls a stone at it—a stone carved with acanthus leaf—and flogs his way onward through the thickets. What is this? A hill? Yes, a hill of chiselled stone, a truncated pyramid, overgrown with trees, once the base of some gorgeous temple or palace.‡ And what is that there? More gigantic masks peering through the treetops, a host of them! He battles his way nearer. It is a great building erupting four-faced towers, fifty-one of them, a building unique, like nothing on earth.§ Trees and towers grow together on the roof, bushes spring from the cracks, grey monkeys swing on the lianes and a wildcat has littered beneath an image of Siva.

The traveller plunges on, his mind reeling. He trips

* The Royal Terrace.

† The Terrace of the Leper-King.

‡ Bapuon.

§ Bayon.



over something hidden under a drift of leaves. A log? No, a fallen Garuda, its beak splintered. Before him a moss-grown lion roars mutely at nothing, its mouth dripping hart's-tongue fern. Behind him a Naga rears out of the choking convolulus in a spray of chiselled heads. No bindweed disturbed but reveals a rose-patterned pilaster, a bas-relief of godly warrior or smiling girl. No grove but hides its astounding overgrown ruin.

Overgrown? Embosomed, rather; strangled in python coils. Trees, a hundred feet high, straddle the groaning roofs; their roots trail down on either side like the tentacles of immense white octopuses sucking nourishment from the earth, wrapping obscene arms about the carven goddesses. Seeds have grown to saplings, saplings to trees, and in swelling forced ton-weight blocks asunder, bursting walls out and roofs open. Banyans have dropped a network of slender air-roots about whole buildings and, waxing, crushed them as one would a matchbox. Dynamite could do no more. Ruin! Ruin!

A ring dove coos; a gibbon monkey utters its long, wavering cry; butterflies wing by—green, brown, peacock blue—but for the rest not a sound, not a movement. Not a sound, not a movement, but all the time the terrible patient force that has crushed and smothered these proud monuments to man's skill and industry is pressing inexorably on, the saplings swelling infinitesimally, minute by minute, the coils binding closer. Ruin! Ruin!

And the traveller, what of him? What is this he has stumbled on in the still jungle underseas? A forsaken temple? An abandoned fortress? Not one temple, but twenty. Not a fortress, but a drowned city, a vanished civilisation, a lost Babylon.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



The thoughts of Father Bouillevaux by his lone campfire that night must have been those of Columbus when first he saw the islands of the New World dark against the sunset, or Balboa the shimmer of the Pacific from his Darien peak—one would say. In point of fact, they were nothing of the sort. Father Bouillevaux recked little of his discovery. He was a good Christian and the monuments were obviously nasty pagan things; he had no use for them at all. He probably ate his supper, swallowed his quinine and went to sleep, giving them no second thought—at all events he hardly considered them worth mentioning.

But ten years later came a man of very different calibre, Henri Mouhot, the naturalist. He came from Siam, explored the ruins, wrote of them with great excitement and enthusiasm, tottered on into Laos and died. Forty-seven years were to elapse. Then French diplomacy succeeded where Khmer arms had failed; the three lost provinces of Battambang, Sisonphon and Siem-reap were restored by Siam to the Cambodian crown and to L'Ecole Française d'Extreme Orient was assigned the task of bringing the wonder city of Yacovarman back to the light.

CHAPTER XX

ANGKOR VAT

I met a man in Bangkok who went to Angkor with Pierre Loti. They journeyed from Siem-reap in a bullock-cart and lived in a palm-thatch hut. Every evening a masterful old Frenchman came round with a pickle-jar of quinine and fed them with it, whether they needed it or not, by the spoonful. Though quinine is still a necessity, the hut has been done away with, a very comfortable bungalow taking its place.

The French have fairly earned a reputation as the world's leading *hôteliars*, but they have not extended their art to Indo-China. They have no notion of making the nourishment fit the clime, chewing stubbornly away at imitation Parisian dishes and turning their backs on the excellent native foods. The Oriental invented curry, has all the ingredients under his hand, and can cook it superlatively well. You can get beatific curries any day in any hotel in China or Siam. A great part of the charm of the Orient for me is its curries. I did obtain curry in Indo-China, but only by sitting up and howling like a dog. I am an Irishman and all Irishmen are popularly considered a little unhinged, a supposition which, being an astute people, we have traded on for all we are worth. An Irishman howling for curry may, if denied, develop rabies and bite the management—"Nom de Dieu, give him his curry!" They gave me curry, but with a surreptitious air, as though in merely serving the stuff the house was losing caste.



Rice also. Indo-China is the second rice-producing country of the world, yet can you get a mouthful of this, the staple product, in any respectable Indo-Chinese hotel? Yes, you can, but only at the cost of making a noise like *canis aurea*, or female jackal, deprived of its young. "Rice!" they ejaculate with pained surprise. "You want *rice*? Coolie food?" Certainly, I want rice. If the coolie eats excellent food, I have every intention of sharing it with him.

Sweet potatoes are also a staple of coolie consumption and therefore taboo. A friend of mine, having been in Louisiana and met the sweet potato in all its candied glory, pleaded piteously for sweet potatoes for three months in a Tonking hotel. Being a New Englander and not having my national reputation for running bloodily amuck if thwarted, no notice was taken of him. Coolie food! Pah! Finally he set up house for himself, but even then his cook (French trained) refused to give him what he wanted. Coolie chow—master couldn't be serious! It was only by giving the boy the alternative of potatoes or the boot that he obtained his desire. I used to hang round his kitchen of a morning till I found out what he was having for tiffin, and if it was sweet potatoes continue to hang till invited—but I never saw them on any other table. Always excepting the bungalow at Angkor. Up there, miles away in the jungle, they can get you anything.

"Curry?" says the manager. "Certainly—every day and all day long, if you like. Rice? By the ton, if you wish. Do you prefer Mountain, Lowland, Burmese, Siamese, or our own? Sweet potatoes? My dear sir, of course!"

I believe if you asked him for a dodo's egg scrambled, or one of the apples of the Hesperides baked in



ANGKOR VAT



a dumpling, he would not bat an eye. How he does it up there among the monkeys and mosquitoes, hundreds of miles from Saigon, is a mystery to me. There's magic in it, I believe. He has a tame djinn locked up in one of his back rooms who fetches and carries for him. I loved the man.

Angkor bungalow almost directly faces the Vat. It is there before you at dawn with the five lotus towers darkly silhouetted against the flaming spears of sunrise, dreamily contemplating its reflection in the wide and shining moat; there at noonday with the heat swimming over its terraces, sugar palms a-droop, buffaloes cooling amid the lily-pads; there at night with the moonlight lying like snow upon its curved roofs, flooding its courts in ghostly light—there always, beckoning, beckoning. It calls you silently, irresistibly, day and night. People go out there alone, at all hours, and when met with are not communicative. Unable to sleep in the stifling small hours I have wandered out along the causeway and up into the vast, still temple and met with other pyjamaed figures smoking their pipes apart and in silence on the moon-bathed heights of the Sanctuary.

Angkor Vat is the sole monument of the group which escaped the jungle inundation. It is probable that it was always used as a place of worship, Buddhists supplanting Brahminists, and as such roughly preserved. It stands on an artificial island formed by a moat two hundred yards wide and nearly three miles in circumference. The approach is from the west, by a stone causeway which crosses the moat and along which two sections of cavalry could ride abreast. A pair of Khmer lions guard the western end, conventional monsters with gaping jaws and manes done up in tight ringlets like those worn by our Early Victorian gran-

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

dams. The balustrades are supported on carved pedestals and are rounded to represent the bodies of Nagas, or sacred serpents, curving up at the ends into fans of seven heads. There is nothing menacing about these huge snakes; in fact, until you get close and see the spread of hissing heads, they suggest opening ferns, curling ostrich-plumes, rather than dangerous reptiles and are supremely decorative and beautiful.

Everywhere in Cambodia you will see the Naga, for, according to legend, the land was once peopled by these semi-human creatures. According to legend, Prah Thong, prince of Delhi, fleeing from the wrath of his father, found himself cut off by the tide on a sand-bank off the Cambodian coast. To him in his dejection came a young Nagi of surpassing loveliness, her skin glinting like a damascened blade, seven jewelled crowns flashing on her seven heads. Soma was her name, daughter of Nagaraja, the king snake. She consoled the young man in a practical manner and the result of this singular union was the Moon Dynasty, from which sprang the mighty Khmer monarchs.

The long causeway crossed, one is confronted by the Portico, in itself a notable building, two hundred and fifty yards in length, composed of double colonnades running north and south from three central towers. The pillars carry a vaulted roof, the stones of which are encorbelled and are held in place merely by their own weight. It is curious that the true arch is nowhere to be found in all Angkor, that even at the comparatively late date of the building of the Vat (A.D. 1115-1180) Khmer architects knew not the keystone dodge which had been in use in Egypt, Assyria and China since time unknown and even in backward Europe for some fifteen centuries.

On each of the four sides of each of the columns



an Apsara, a heavenly dancing girl, postures gaily in an acanthus bower. They wear horned headdresses, necklaces, bangles, anklets, and little else. The little figures are chiselled with exceeding fineness, each jewel, though no bigger than a pin's head, is clearly defined. They crook their shapely knees, bend their tapering



A heavenly bride. Angkor bas-reliefs.

fingers, their lissom bodies sway to the rhythm of inaudible music; they are charming little ladies. Charming, also, are the stately Tevadas, heavenly brides, who pose on the east wall of the Portico, holding fans and lotus-buds daintily in their long fingers, enigmatically smiling. Heavenly brides and heavenly dancers—how attractive a place must be Brahminic paradise!



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



Pass through the Portico and at the end of a second massive causeway stands the great Vat itself, its western façade three times that of Notre Dame de Paris, a mountain of sandstone, piling up and up to erupt at length into the five heaven-aspiring cupolas. To describe the intricacies of its construction would fill a book, and in the end the forest would be invisible for trees, so to speak. To put it simply, the soil excavated from the moat was heaped up into a hill which was cut into three concentric platforms, each belted with cloisters. The second story carries a cupola at each of its four corners; on the top platform stands the supreme cluster. The foundations are of pudding-stone, the visible parts of sandstone. Not a vestige of mortar is to be found in the length and breadth of Angkor; the blocks hold together by their own perfect fit, though in places there are traces of metal clamps.

Behind the outer colonnades on the first story are inner colonnades, courts, libraries and water-filled basins. Fourteen staircases connect the first story with the second, twelve lead on up to the top. The steps are narrow, high and slippery, the pitch precipitous; in fact, the ascent is like climbing a ship's ratlines without the security of handhold and should not be attempted by any one given to dizziness. Overhead, surrounded by its four lesser sisters, soars the Preasat, the supreme tower.

It is in the outer cloisters of the lower story that the principal bas-reliefs are to be found. They are six feet high and run right round the entire building at its greatest perimeter, a distance of eight hundred yards, unreeling before you a moving picture of a splendid and barbaric past.

Let us turn right-handed down the southern half of the western gallery. The conch horns blare, gongs



boom, the Khmer armies are moving into battle. Lesser chiefs ride in spider-wheeled chariots drawn by prancing, rat-tailed horses. Greater chiefs stand erect on elephants with embroidered trappings and howdahs. The chiefs brandish swords and javelins, the elephants curl their trunks and cock their tails. Battle is joined, the infantry are locked together, stabbing, hewing, falling over one another. They have one another by the wrists, throat, hair. Others leap to catch the horses' bridles, club them over the head. The proud horses founder, chiefs sink dying out of their chariots, severed heads tumble, dead strew the ground. The stone is in furious turmoil, instinct with ravening life.

In the pavilion which unites the south and west galleries are episodes from the Râmâyana, the combat between the monkey kings, Bali and Sugriva, culminating in the death of the former surrounded by his harem of lady monkeys. The artist has been unfortunate in their expression, for, so far from being downcast at the death of their lord, they are openly grinning.

Here, also, are peaceful scenes depicting everyday life in old Angkor, a pleasure boat floating on a river swarming with fish, probably the Tonlé Sap, with a family taking their ease therein, under a canopy. A nurse-girl dandles a baby, her ladyship another. On the river-bank two fighting-cocks are being matched, their backers betting feverishly.

Turn to the left again and a gorgeous pageant of arms and the man unrolls itself down the walls of the long south gallery. Here are ladies, drawn in covered hand-carts, borne in curtained palanquins; one is teasing a pet monkey with a tassel-end. The beauties have come out from under the cart tilts and perch on the shafts, the better to be seen and admired—and, God



bless 'em! why shouldn't they? It is what they are for. It is to keep them soft and sleek and loot more jewels for their pretty throats that the men have been out on the Cham and Tai frontiers, hacking and smiting.



Khmer chieftain. Angkor bas-reliefs.

Here comes the victorious army, infantry and cavalry, the great chiefs posing erect on their trumpeting elephants, fine martial figures, each with his accompanying umbrellas, fans and oriflammes. At the head



ANGKOR VAT



of the procession goes a Siamese ally, wearing his hair in long plaits and fingering his bow with a rather listless air. His men shamble along anyhow, in sharp contrast to the orderly Khmers. Apparently discipline in Lophburie was not what it was in Angkor—or merely that the sculptor was a loyal Cambodian. Up aloft on a hilltop, sheltered by a very forest of state umbrellas, sits Parama Vishnuloka, the king, reviewing the big parade.

Now we come to the Gallery of Future Life. The panel is divided horizontally into three stages. The good and doubtful ascend by ramps to the upper planes, palanquins are permitted, fans and umbrellas. The wicked are herded along the lowest level by giant demons, yoked neck and neck, dragged by the hair and heels. Lions scrunch them by the way, elephants toss them, snakes, dogs and even rhinos have at 'em. They are extremely thin, you can count the ribs on any one of them—and no wonder!

We arrive before the Judgment Seat, where sits Yama, God of Death and Justice, on his sacred bull. The good go on up to their reward, but some of the doubtful are caught out and come shooting down through a trap into the basement. From now on it is just Heaven and Hell, Heaven above (as usual) and Hell below.

Above in elegant pavilions sit the blessed, on cushions, surrounded by bejewelled Tevadas, who offer caskets of sweetmeats and ply the fans. Some, particularly blessed, have as many as eighteen Tevadas a man. Like doves above the celestial pleasaunces hover flocks of little Apsaras, dancing, dancing; the blue air is sweet with their singing. A happy spot!

Down below, separated only from the heavenly realms by a frieze of Garudas, the naughty are catch-



ing it hot and strong, having their jaws wrenched asunder by energetic demons, their tongues torn out; they are being dismembered, peeled of their flesh, roasted, blinded, crushed and hammered full of nails. Giotto in his brightest moments could not better this; it would have been an education to Torquemada.

In the eastern gallery is the great tug-o'-war scene. Devas (good genii) right, Asooras (evil genii) left. Their rope is a mighty Naga which has taken a turn of its body round the summit of Mount Mandara, which, in turn, rests on the shell of a turtle. Vishnu clings to both sides of the rope like the referee at a tug-o'-war. Indra hangs in mid-air clasping the mountain-top. The ape-king, Hanuman, is on the side of the Angels, clinging on to the Naga's tail and shouting encouragements. At each end chariots and elephants stand parked, waiting on their masters, like cars outside a football match. The Devas heave, the Asooras heave, the mountain rotates on the turtle's back, churning the Sea of Milk into Ambrosia. In the depths below all is turmoil, snakes are tied in knots, fish snap in half, crocodiles come apart in many places. In the heavens above troupes of little Apsaras merrily dance, trailing garlands.

The bas-reliefs of the northeast corner are inferior and unfinished, but getting on toward the western, or show-side, the carvings regain their vigour and polish. Vishnu is leading the gods to battle against the Rakshasas. The cavalry plunge into the fray, dancing like circus riders on their chargers' backs. Brahma, drawing ten bows at once, rides his sacred goose, which spurns an opposing lion with one foot while slapping a second in the face with the other—good old bird! Vishnu dashes into action astride his faithful Garuda; Skanda, the warrior, rides a fleet peacock; Surya, the



sun-god, bow drawn taut, rushes into action in a chariot, the sun rising in a golden disc behind him.

In the northwest pavilion are peaceful scenes; there are tiers and tiers of chiefs sitting in council in the forest shade, processions of slaves bring bowls of fruit and jars of, let us hope, wine—they deserve it after so much battling. But it is a respite only. Turn the corner into the western gallery and they are at it again in a climax of fury, Râmâ and his monkey friends against the forces of the wicked. The wicked have chariots and horses, lions, elephants and all the panoply of war. The apes have little more than their teeth, but they go at it with the utmost good heart. They hurl themselves through the air, landing on men's backs, on the necks of horses, scratching, biting, and by sheer weight of numbers bear them down. Apes and men are locked together on the ground, wrestling, clawing, limb twisted about writhing limb. One giant monkey is strangling a lion with its hands and biting through the throat of a second. Another has gripped an agonized elephant by the trunk, while a friend chews at its leg. The King of Ceylon, Ravana the ravisher, sweeps through the frenzy in a lion-drawn chariot; above him the long banners stream like flames. Râmâ, bow in hand, balances on the shoulders of the ape-king, Hanuman; below him a monkey orchestra discourses wild music with drums and gongs, yelling. Seventy yards of it, six feet high, one packed, tangled mass of figures, smiting, stabbing, biting, tearing. It is thrilling, breathless, a delirium of savagery. One can almost hear the clash of weapons, the roar of chariot-wheels, the shrieks of the monkeys, the groans of the dying; the very panels seem to vibrate with the whirling fury of it.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



So end the bas-reliefs, a series to which for animation and immensity the world holds no rival.

Up in the dark vaulted roofs—once hidden by wooden ceilings painted gold and purple—innumerable bats twitter and squeak, their droppings strew the pavement, the stench is almost insupportable. The evening flight of the bats is one of the sights of Angkor. Punctually at sunset they collect at a given spot in the building and at a signal come buzzing forth and, forming column, flitter away into the afterglow. A French official with a weakness for statistics figured it out that, at a very conservative estimate, there must be scores of thousands of them. At all events, when the last is leaving the Vat the leaders are out of sight; they streak the sky from east to west like a thin black ribbon of smoke.

There was an old Gaul came to Angkor bringing with him a pair of plum-coloured gloves which he wore on all occasions. He had also a pair of wise and humorous blue eyes, a flowing cravat and an immense frizzled beard. From his extreme furriness we nicknamed him "Shwe Moang," after the founder of the celebrated hairy family of Burma—from his conversation and habits I should say he had founded a good many hairy families himself. For the rest he was what the French call "*un original*," half poet, half *boulevardier*, wholly philosopher. Scaling the Sanctuary stairs one evening I put my head over the top—and nearly fell down backwards. In the shadow of the arch was an extraordinary being, corpulent, naked, matted with hair. I recovered my balance and looked again. It was Shwe Moang. He had stripped himself of coat, shirt, boots and socks and was sitting in the porch clad only in rolled-up trousers and a pair of lilac suspenders. He really was an astonishing sight, a cross between a



squatting Buddha and an orang-outang; I had no idea a man could be so mossy.

He greeted me affably and explained that he spent the heat of day up there; the sun could not strike through those massive walls and if there was any wind going he got it. I complimented him on his suspenders and hoped he'd leave me his pelt when he died, it would make a good carriage rug; and from that we passed on to other subjects, among them, bats. Shwe Moang had been keeping an eye on them. Round about flitting time a bat, larger than the others, flew round and round the Vat, squeaking loudly, he said, and thought it must be the king bat gathering his forces. Matabele ants have their generals and so do baboons and there was no reason why bats should not also. He thought they assembled in the second story, for on three occasions he had seen them come out of the broken cupola of the northwest tower. "It belched like a volcano," said Shwe Moang. "Suddenly—Pouf!—and the air smoked with bats. *C'est curieux, hein!*"

The second story has been made a repository for Buddhas—Buddhas plain and Buddhas gilded, Buddhas intact and Buddhas broken, Buddhas sitting and Buddhas lying, every conceivable form of Buddha; indeed, so numerous are they as to necessitate being stacked away like logs. It would appear that any one wishing to acquire merit (and who does not?) has only to present an image to some popular temple—with results often embarrassing to the management.

An American ship-captain, trading off the coast of adjacent Annam, was on the outlook for ballast. A priest came to him stealthily and intimated that he could supply the need. He was as good as his word; the vessel sailed on her way comfortably trimmed fore



and aft with superfluous Buddhas, and the *bonze* could move round his pagoda again.

The third story achieved, the immense Vat lies below you, its causeway, its libraries and basins, cruciform terraces and concentric galleries. And the whole colossal system has been carved as a Japanese will carve a knob of ivory, carved from top to bottom, within and without. No single block has been neglected, nothing has been skimped. Everywhere is sculpture so delicately cut, so closely interwoven, that the walls seem hung with tapestry, with lace and sumptuous brocade. Benign Tevadas smile from the pilasters, gay Apsaras dance along the friezes. There are episodes from the Hindu epics, Garudas, Nagas, lions and praying monks; intricate patterns of roses, birds and lotuses. Chain and multifoil designs decorate cornices, jambs and lintels; wreaths of acanthus crown the capitals; the raised tympaná open like feather fans, the roofs are plumed with them. A prodigious work, a glorious work!

Down on the causeway is a single nude Cambodian, come to tap the sugar-palms. He is tiny, no bigger than an ant. Yet in that midget brain this stupendous plan was conceived. Those puny arms delved the three-mile moat, carried thousands of tons of soil, basketful by basketful; quarried these thousands of tons of stone, dragged them all those scorching leagues, cut them, polished them, set them up, fitted them and carved them with tens of thousands of figures and hundreds of thousands of fragile buds, leaves and flowers. What tale of bloodshed, rapine and captivity stands behind it all! What tale of whips and chains, hunger, thirst, back-break and heart-break! Yet it went on. Men dropped and died, men took their places; stone by stone the mighty temple went on and



up. O omnipotent atom! Sublime, indomitable
midget!

Towards evening I would climb to the eyrie where Shwe Moang squatted in his nakedness and sit beside him while he discoursed learnedly on the fall of cities and civilisations, puffing jets of cigarette smoke through bristling nostrils. The sky was fleckless blue void no longer, but a splendid blood-red chaos, reeking, smouldering. One could imagine that the gods were riding to war again, Vishnu, Surya, Skanda the Paladin, urging their fire-lit chariots over those burning peaks and chasms, bow-strings taut, javelins upraised, shouting in exultation. But no echo of the high conflict reached the Vat; all was quiet, except for the drone of *bonzes* at prayer in the wooden pagoda down below and the tinkle of its wind-stirred bells. Quietly the basins mirrored back the ruby light, the great building turned from chrome to rose and the court-yards filled with shadow as with water—quietly, quietly.

As the sun drowned itself in purple cloud-banks beyond Tonlé Sap and dusk closed down, secret life began to stir in the Vat. A giant gecko lizard barked "Tuk-Kaw!" with startling force up in the Sanctuary and was answered by another down in the second story. A crow launched itself from the southwest cupola and flapped heavily away; an owl hopped out upon the pediment, stretching its wings. The twitter and squeak of the bats in every tower and cloister became more and more excited. Then, as though loosed by the swoop of single baton, millions of cicadas shrilled suddenly into chorus, followed a second later by the roar of bullfrogs from the moat . . . and over the jungle rim, quiet as a ghost, came the moon.

Then Shwe Moang would shake himself and ex-

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

claim, "*Tiens! Il faut dîner; il faut vivre,*" and put on his shirt and his plum-coloured gloves and we would descend, leaving the Vat alone with the mysterious night.



Cambodian dancers.

CHAPTER XXI

A DANCE

Forty naked urchins squatted in a wide ring before the Portico, holding torches of sandalwood and looking like so many skinny brown frogs. A search round the Bungalow had provided a supply of cigarette ends at which they sucked luxuriously—and many of them not ten years old, naughty little devils! However, it was no good telling them they were ruining their constitutions because they didn't know they had any—moreover, I did the same myself at the same age. Under the Naga balustrade sat a shrunken crone with cropped grey hair and tumbled-in cheeks, chewing betel. In her day she was a King's dancer, but no one would have guessed it. Beside her was the orchestra, a *kong* player sitting in the middle of a wooden horseshoe studded with small gongs, a xylophone man, men with drums, flutes and cymbals.

The old ballet mistress nodded, and the band began to play. The frogs stopped scratching themselves and sat up, expectant, lifting their torches high. Out of the darkness, into the circle of smoky orange light, came the dancers, four girls, holding bouquets in both hands, marching with deliberate steps, knees turned outwards. Their arms were stained with saffron, their faces chalked to the whiteness of paper, the eyebrows blackened and the lips streaked with vivid carmine, giving the appearance of papier-mâché masks. Slowly, rhythmically, they turned and swayed and postured. Except for the sinuous twistings of their arms there



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



was nothing fluid in their movements; they passed from one posture to another with an imperceptible pause at each as though engaged in a dreamy physical drill. They finished their dance and marched out.

The music changed. Entered the Prince and Princess and their retinue at the same deliberate pace. The royal pair wore tapering crowns of gilt filigree, tassels of flowers dangled over their ears. Their clothes were stiff with gold embroidery and sparkling with many-colored jewels. The Prince held a toy sword and from his shoulders spouted half-moon epaulets. The retinue, soldiers and maids of honour, in their gold-worked blue, crimson and orange, were hardly less gorgeous. They moved in a slow and stately procession, a pause between each straddling step, round the ring and out again, the leaping torchlight glinting on their gilt and jewels.

A giant entered, the villain of the piece. He wore a green mask of ferocious expression with round glaring eyes and terrible upturned fangs. Round and round the ring he capered, waving his sword, threatening mischief to the lovers. All unsuspecting they re-entered, with the retinue and danced, slowly as ever, hands pivoting on wrists; fingers, elbows, feet bent at impossible angles; arms and bodies in jointless undulation. They were the Apsaras of the bas-reliefs, come to life, reincarnated—all is that ever was.

The Demon's moment arrived; he seized the Princess by the wrist, dragging her from her lover. She may have been disturbed by this sudden rape, but her expression never altered, nor did that of the bereft; the moon-faces remained as placid as ever—*papier-mâché*.

The Prince engaged the ravisher in combat. There was no passion in it, no excitement; the mock weapons



A DANCE



clicked a *larghetto* accompaniment to the music. Slowly the duellists circled, locked swords and swayed together. The Prince placed a foot on the Demon's thigh; the Demon did the same by him; their bodies swayed and writhed together, slowly, slowly, faces immutable, hands in ceaseless slow gyration.

It meant something, all this; every gesture, inclination of the head, contortion of the fingers, was symbolical, expressing hope, joy, reverence or anguish, but of what I could only guess—the serene set faces told one nothing.

The Prince was temporarily defeated, the victor swaggered leisurely round the ring fondling his prize, who showed neither approval nor disapproval, an Eastern woman, a chattel, unresisting spoil of the stronger. The Prince took fresh heart and with the help of a soldier defeated the Demon. The retinue, who until then had rendered their hard-pressed lord no assistance at all, hustled the vanquished fiend into outer darkness and the dance was over.

So on, slowly, rhythmically, through the Fan and Baton Dances, weaving languid patterns with their glittering bodies, while the birds and monkeys called in the jungle and the moon came up over the Vat's misty cupolas, looking down upon a scene she had watched so often on this very terrace, centuries ago. Gongs humming on and on, drums interminably throbbing and in the smoke of leaping torches bright figures weaving eternal patterns. It seemed to me that it was all a dream; that there was neither time nor space; that Suryavarman the Great, with his cat's-eye rings and his crown of jasmine, and I, the nobody, were one.

CHAPTER XXII

WESTWARD

I left Saigon in a little flush-decked steamer which was built in Holland in the eighties, run round the Moluccas till she got tired, and then sold to the French. The staterooms opened directly into a central saloon, decorated with hideous blue and brown tile panels depicting Delft, Dordrecht and Haarlem in the snow, with the idea, I suppose, that tropical passengers might gaze on them and keep cool. My fellow first-class passengers consisted of a biscuit-coloured old woman with a black cotton umbrella and a fat black dog on a string; also a sulky little bullfrog of a Frenchman and his Japanese mistress.

We cast off in the late afternoon and headed downstream behind a big Osaka steamer. Few rivers have been devised less interesting than that of Saigon, so I stretched myself in a long chair and pretended to be asleep, for I knew that did I for one second reveal consciousness the *métisse* would talk and it was far too hot. The bullfrog lay in another chair keeping her at bay by the sheer blackness of his looks. Deprived of human victims, she discussed the visit of the Governor-General, the price of coffee, etc., etc., with her obese mongrel, which, being firmly moored by its string, could but endure.

Sampans went by, loaded so deep it seemed our bow wave must swamp them. Naked fishermen sculled their wisps of craft right under our stern and rode them through the wash, standing erect, yapping like



terriers—all Annamites talk as though they had cleft palates. The river snaked and twisted and, at times, bent at right angles, so that the *Osaka maru* appeared to be furrowing straight across the paddy. So low were the banks that she was visible down to her second row of port-holes.

Afternoon burnt out in a red and orange sunset. Dinner was laid on a trestle table on the poop. The *métisse*, who had changed from a black cotton wrapper with blue spots to a blue cotton wrapper with black spots, could no longer be denied. Her eyes, the sad, brown unquenchably curious eyes of a monkey, darted to and fro from the bullfrog to myself. She was waiting for somebody to break the ice, curiosity gnawing like a cancer. Neither of us males made a move.

At length, unable to bear the pain any longer, she plunged in herself, selecting me as her first victim. Who and what was I? Without waiting for an answer, she said she had made up her mind that I was an English commercial traveller; English because of my beefy complexion, commercial because nobody would travel on that sort of boat for pleasure. I always try to be obliging, so I told her she was quite right, English commercial traveller I was.

But if I thought it would be left at that I was mistaken. She wanted to know what I travelled in. I replied that I travelled in ladies' underwear for Huntley and Palmer. Had I obtained many orders in Indo-China? I admitted that I had not. As far as I could ascertain, the ladies of Indo-China wore little or no underclothing. She then asked me whither I was bound. I replied to Bangkok. There was no reason to suppose that the ladies of Siam wore any more underclothing than the ladies of Indo-China, the climate being identical, but carrying something rather

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

chic, not to say *piquant*, in the way of camisoles I had hopes of inducing them to wear underclothes uppermost.

I don't suppose she believed a word I said, but she couldn't very well say so, and allowed me to get on with my soup, turning her batteries on the bullfrog. With more respect for the truth than I, he immediately volunteered that he came from Bien Hoa and was going to Pulo Condore, where he expected to remain twelve months. He was born in Clermont, Puy de Dôme, educated at Lyons, a civil servant, thirty-eight years of age, single, baptised and vaccinated. The lady was in no wise chilled by the frozen civility of his manner. Pulo Condore! Why, that was where she was going herself. Then away she went. She had a daughter there, married to a warder. Eggs were very scarce on the island. The governor allowed each *fonctionnaire* only one per day. If married he got another for his wife and another for each child—it was therefore necessary to have two children to get a respectable omelette. She was taking her daughter some hens, twenty of them; she had them in a crate up forward. They had bananas on the islands, but nothing else. She was taking several baskets of oranges and apples. They, too, were up forward, with the hens.

The thing her poor Eloise missed most of all was the cinema—by the way, had we seen Charlot in "*La ruée vers l'or*"? Ravishing! But she couldn't take her a cinema. Eloise was her second daughter. Her eldest, Eugenie, was cashier in a department-store on the Boulevard Charner, Saigon, and was as yet *filles*, but there was a young man showing her attention, a chemist from a shop in Rue Catinat, bald, but *très comme il faut*. It appeared that Eloise was doing her



best to qualify for the omelette and she was hastening to her side. Also Toto needed a change of air, Toto being the black nondescript. Toto, despite his corpulence, was, it seemed, a romantic, a great lover. Unfortunately his aspirations were always towards ladies of superior pedigree and several gentlemen had threatened to fill him with buckshot if they found him prowling round their houses again. In truth, she hardly dare let him off his string for a moment. It was high time he left Saigon.

She bubbled on and on, leaping from the scandals of the capital to Eugénie's stomachic troubles, from the price of foodstuffs to the collapse of the franc; it was not necessary for either of us to say a word. The bullfrog gulped his coffee, bowed and went to the rail, where I followed him.

A chain of lights on the port hand marked Coker-nut Bay. High on its hill the lighthouse of Cap St. Jacques whipped the darkness with a double white beam. The sea-wind was blustering in, strong, fresh and salty. After the fever-ridden, airless plains of Cambodia it was like meeting a friend from home. A triangle of red and green lights swayed over the wave-crests and a pilot-launch nosed alongside. The pilot, clad in white drill and a pith helmet—it seems a point of honour with pilots to look anything but nautical—went overside, the pretty lights swept away astern and our screw churned again.

I drifted into conversation with the bullfrog. Pulo Condore was a convict settlement, I understood. What was it like?

At that he let rip. Like! A ring of rocky islets one hundred miles away in the middle of the sea inhabited exclusively by thieves, murderers and their half-caste guards. He jerked his thumb towards the



old *métisse*. "That sort—paugh!" He had had a district close to Saigon, his friends, his café, his bridge, his Citroën, his guns, his Japanese. He could jump in his car after work, see the play in Saigon, sup at the Rotunde, and be home by two. Then, all of a sudden to be dragged out by the roots and packed off to this isle of brigands and black-and-tans!

"But surely there'll be some whites there?" I soothed.

"A handful, perhaps, all hating each other."

"But you'll get some sport, shooting?"

"What?" he sneered. "Gulls?"

"How about fishing?"

"No boats. If they kept boats they couldn't keep convicts."

"Swimming, then."

"Impossible—sharks."

He shook hands abruptly. "Good-night. It's going to be rough and I'm going to be sick." A pessimist, evidently.

I went below myself, but not to sleep. The old packet was well out to sea by this and rolling like a pig in a ditch. The ports were perforce closed and despite the strong wind none of it came below; it was unpleasantly hot. Even to the most hardened a rolling ship is no joke. Lie down and you feel like a poached egg on a shaken plate. The lower side of you sticks to the plate while the upper slops this way and that.

Added to the rolling and the heat were ants, ants on the mattress and pillow, up one's pyjama legs and in one's hair. Added to these again were cockroaches as big as prawns. A man in Singapore told me he travelled on this same ship from Kep to Bangkok. Entering her cabin one afternoon his wife saw an enormous



mangy old buck rat sitting on her bunk. She uttered a scream that nearly lifted the deck off, sprang on the saloon table and stayed there, eating and sleeping, for the rest of the trip. Nor did his lady deny the story. "You never saw such a rat in your life," said she. "The look it gave me. . . !"

I confess I saw no rats myself, but the ants and cockroaches were quite enough and at midnight I put on a pipe and a pair of slippers and sought the deck. I crossed the empty saloon and reached the companion-way, when a terrific sea struck the vessel along her full length, setting her right over on her beam-ends—and hard after it came a second. Having a hand on the rail, I came to no harm, beyond sitting down violently, but a table tore from its fastenings and turned a somersault up-ended against a picture of Groningen to the accompaniment of all the pantry china crashing at once, the *métisse* in her cabin shrieking to the Virgin, the bullfrog in his, noisily fulfilling a prophecy.

Three chairs uprooted themselves and followed the table and after them went an avalanche of books, papers, cruets and—most surprisingly—men. When I entered the saloon I could have sworn it was empty. Those two tremendous shocks revealed it anything but; that half the crew had crept quietly below and disposed themselves for the night under the long table. Three came shooting out and stood on their heads against the starboard skirting, another went too leeward mixed up in a broken chair, and a fifth walloped off a settee and rolled over and over like a log, the avalanche of paper snowing him under as he went. To see those dazed Celestials sit up and rub themselves, stupidly wondering whether they were in this world or another, was one of the funniest sights I have seen for many a day, and despite the fact that



we were still beam-ended, that the wall was where the floor should have been, I clung to the companion rail and laughed and laughed.

Slowly the old tub got on her feet again and pandemonium broke out on deck. I ascended to find an excited but effective Frenchman kicking Chinamen about. A steering-chain had snapped where it could not immediately be got at and we were consequently out of control. By rigging purchases from the tiller to the after mooring bollards and back to the drum of the emergency-wheel, we got the boat to answer once more; the Chinese seamen watching our soaking labours with sympathetic interest. Such of the night as remained was uneventful.

Next morning we poked into a ring of precipitous islets and anchored off the largest. A few white buildings with red roofs stood back from the beach; behind them the mountain rose, grown thick with scrub. This was Pulo Condore, the French penal settlement. Writing from Siam in 1686 an employé of the East India Company thus addresses his directors: "Pulo Condore is the spot best suited for this establishment. . . . It has three good anchorages, many little brooks, a river, and the most agreeable verdure in the world." In a report dated July, 1721, Renault, a factor of the French company, thus addresses *his* directors: "There are few places more forbidding and sterile than Condore," adding that the waters abound with sharks "*d'une grandeur prodigieuse*," the island with "enormous serpents, many rats, and an infinity of insects which introduce themselves everywhere," and ends by saying that they must not think of establishing "*un commerce*" there.

Which of the two was telling the truth, glowing Englishman or gloomy Gaul? Probably both—one sees as



one feels and there had been happenings between the visits. In 1699 a certain Allan Catchpoole was sent by the John Company to China to establish factories. In 1702 the Chinese kicked him out. Undaunted, he returned again and yet again. In 1703, having got his third kick, it was impressed on him that he wasn't wanted, so he retired on Pulo Condore, built a fort and manned it with Macassar soldiers. In 1705, their term being up, they demanded their release. Catchpoole wasn't the man to address in that tone. He refused point blank and awaited orders. The orders came, bidding him transfer to Banjermassin—but they came too late. The Macassars had risen in the night and murdered all the whites in their beds—all with the exception of two, the Reverend Doctor Pound and Mr. Solomon Lloyd, who escaped in a boat and after great sufferings reached Jahore in the Malay Peninsula. The Englishman of the glowing report landed before the massacre, Renault after. He must have visited the ruined fort, seen the unburied skeletons lying where they fell on the tragic night of March 3rd, the jungle creeping in, pictured himself on just such another night, alone on that island far out at sea, the natives risen, no help anywhere, shuddered, returned to his ship and written those words, "*Il est peu d'endroits qui soient si affreux. . . .*"

In 1884, according to Bouinai, the site of the fort was still discernible, but whether or not it is to this day I cannot say. Not having the necessary qualifications of murder or brigandage I was forbidden the shore—much to my regret, for I wanted to raise my hat to the bones of the stubborn Catchpoole where they lie beneath the weeds and tumbled stones. It takes courage, however foolish, to stand firm against heavy odds, and none whatever to run away.

THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS

There was nothing tragic in the appearance of the island that morning we rolled at anchor in South-West Bay. The sun shone strongly on the mountain-tops, a sea of cornflower blue hammered at the outer reefs, draping the rocks with frills of sparkling foam. A rowboat came off, towing a cable, and was followed



Clung like bulldogs.

by two lighters dragged hand over hand by gangs of convicts. Martinique negroes of the Colonial Infantry took up positions at the rail, revolvers on hip, and the convicts swarmed aboard. They were by no means weighed down with shame or dejected, but a very cheerful and active crowd. They pounced like tigers on the cargo, clung like bulldogs to the tails of live bullocks and swung them bellowing, outboard.



In the intervals they wheedled titbits from the cook and sold me dried balloon-fish, conch-shells and coral sprays. They were, moreover, embarrassingly honest—as far as I was concerned. I gave them trifling sums for their prickly bladders because the poor chaps wanted money, never dreaming that I should be landed with the beastly things. However, on leaving Condore, I went below and found my cabin chock-a-block with fantastic fish. All along the bunk and rack they lay, where the steward had neatly deposited them, distended and goggling. It was too late to restore them, so I popped them through the porthole, eleven in all. They have doubtless long since floated back to port and been resold to some other mug.

The majority of the convicts were genuine miscreants, but a large number were deputy convicts, or so the mate informed me. A wealthy native, having misbehaved himself, hires a poor one to take the blame. The coolie comes into court, swears the tremendous Buddhist oath (“If I speak falsely . . . may blood spurt from every pore of my body . . . may I be born a hermaphrodite five hundred times . . . be hurried into hell and crucified . . . etc., etc., etc.) that it was he and not the thrice honourable Tran-van-chat who cut the ears, nose and tongue off the revolting and low-born Ngటుong-gack on the night of the fourteenth *ultimo*, is supported by a cloud of professional perjurers and either gets executed or goes to Pulo Condore. If the former, it is bad luck; if the latter, at the end of a few years he returns to live in idleness on the pension provided by Tran-van-chat. Many honest men work harder and longer for less.

At the end of two hours the last bale and the last protesting bullock had been slung overside and the lighters cast off. The old *métisse*, babbling *crescendo*,



her hens, her fruit, her dog and umbrella, were bundled into the rowboat. The bullfrog gave me a limp hand-shake and went down the ladder, followed by his little Japanese—all that was left to him. I watched them bobbing shorewards over the blue rollers, the *métisse*, her black hat flapping, firing volleys of questions at the port officers; the Japanese girl sitting stiff and unmoved in her gay *kimono*; the poor bullfrog brooding miserably in the stern-sheets. Farewell!

By nine next morning we had rounded Cambodia Point and anchored off a wooded shore with a simple pole jetty at its base and the thatched roofs of three huts showing among the trees. The mate told me that this was the port of Hong-chong.

"Not to be confused with the port of Hongkong," said I. "Whatever makes you stop at this drowsy little hole?"

He replied that they sometimes picked up a bag or two of pepper.

Three craft emerged from some hidden creek, a pretty little junk, a gig and a tiny canoe, the last containing two Annamite wenches and a Chinaman in striped pyjamas. The thing was no bigger than a Rob Roy and there was quite a chop on the sea. The girls paddled while the Chinaman baled with a coker-nut shell. How they kept the chip of a thing from swamping was a wonder to me. The gig received two cases of wine, the canoe a basket of white rabbits, the junk nothing. All three cast off. The anchor came home, the screw revolved, churning up masses of mud. I took a look round before going below to fetch some tobacco. The gig was well away for the shore, the canoe hard on her heels. The junk was standing across our bows on the port tack, a good hundred yards distant.



I went below and was leisurely stuffing my pouch when one of our frequent pandemoniums cut loose. Thinking the steering-gear had again gone out of business, or the funnel tumbled overboard, I went up the companionway at the jump, to see a jumbled mass of sails, masts, cordage, hatch-covers, oars, mats and green cokernuts go bumping along our side. At the same moment a Malay, wet as a seal and smeared with mud (he had been dragged along the bottom), hove himself over the rail, eyes starting out of his head. I looked around. There was the canoe paddling steadily for the jetty. There was the gig turning back. But the pretty little junk, where was she? Not a sign anywhere. A clear sea—except for the tangled wreckage drifting astern. She must have recrossed our bows on the opposite tack and been cut slap in half—as in fact was the case. We lowered a boat, handed the dripping crew (all were saved) over to the gig and continued on our way, having been off Hong-chong perhaps half an hour. It wasn't as drowsy as I thought.

That afternoon the anchor-winch gave up the ghost. The cable had therefore to be hauled by means of a gun-tackle to the cargo-winch on No. 1 hatch. As it could only be got in a couple of fathoms at a time, getting under weigh was a lengthy business. Not that I worried. The shore spelt more fever for me and I didn't care how long we were getting to Bangkok. Neither did the captain, apparently. On clearing Saigon he put from him his gilt-edged glory to reappear in patched khaki slacks, an old plaid cap and unlaced tennis-shoes. The engineer wore a boiler suit and nothing else, while the mate hung his shirt-tail out over the seat of his trousers, presumably to air it.

We loitered on for days through an archipelago of wooded islands; dodging round bamboo stockades



stuck out in mid-channel to catch fish; scraping past sunken reefs with personal names such as "Ellen Banka" and "Jan Peters" in doubtful honour of the vessels whose bottoms discovered them; nosing into mangrove-bordered rivers; calling at invisible ports. The procedure was unvaried. "Plop!" went the anchor in some green bay which looked just like any other green bay, and in response to our syren a launch, a junk, sometimes only a sampan, issued from the mangroves. A case or two was exchanged for a bale or two. White men came aboard to sign papers and generally stayed to tiffin. Did we propose to land a tin of sardines three or four officials paddled out, wrote a book about it—and then ate the sardines.

Fashionable wear in those latitudes was either loose native dress or pyjamas. At Cay Dua a young Frenchman came aboard in pyjamas so loud they could not have been used for sleeping purposes. Apricot silk they were, covered with crimson rings as big as saucers. At Duong-Dong we had a lady visitor and there was a dinner party, the mate tucking in his shirt-tail for the occasion. At Kep we loaded dried fish of such penetrating bouquet that even the cockroaches lost much of their vivacity and it was no longer necessary to announce our approach on the syren. In two or three places we touched ground, but not for long. The engineer threw his cigarette away, went below and buzzed the old propeller round till it had kicked the mud loose and we floated off backward.

I spent the lazy days in a long-chair under the poop awning, followed our course in the Pilot Book—between naps. On the An Thoi group it is darkly mysterious. "There are channels with apparently deep water . . . but they should not be used, as dangers exist other than those shown on the charts." What,



WESTWARD



in Heaven's name! Mermaids? Sea-serpents? Whisper! Concerning the Pirate Isles it frankly throws in its hand. "The navigator must use his own discretion." I learned that the beaches of Pulo Wai "afford turtle." (City aldermen, take notice!) Bulau contains a large number of wild boars; Mon Ni medicinal waters; Koh Mak sea-slugs; while on the pleasant isle of Koh Lan "bananas and pineapples are plentiful." The mariner who wishes to get himself wrecked on Koh Lan and



Numerous tigers.

browse on an arcadian diet must, however, be careful not to confuse it with Koh Chang, otherwise he'll get an unpleasant surprise, for the salient feature of Koh Chang is its "numerous tigers."

One glowing dawn we wobbled past a rocky islet with a lighthouse atop, Cape Liant away to the no'th'-ard—Siamese land—and by noon were anchored in Bangkok Bay. There was nothing to be seen except a pilot hulk and a screw-pile lighthouse, so low and flat is the land as to be hardly visible. We lay there all the



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



afternoon, evening and night admiring the nothingness, waiting for a tide to make up its mind. Tides in the Siamese Gulf are either ignorant of natural laws or just plain ornery. Sometimes they roll up twice a day and sometimes they don't, just as they feel inclined. The springs do not happen at new and full moon as is customary, but at some other quarter, when least expected. The depth of Bangkok bar is affected by the wind, increasing with a southerly blow and decreasing with a northerly. In addition the bar itself shifts about like a pat of butter on a hot plate and is stuck all over with fishing-stakes. To make things easier, the Siamese, some years ago, sank a number of rock-laden junks abreast of West Point.

"The city of Bangkok," says my friend the Pilot Book, "is accessible to all vessels that can cross the bar." Quite!

The flood-tide decided to act at six in the morning, when I was, very properly, asleep. I therefore missed seeing Paknam and woke to find myself well upriver. Shores, feathered with palms, bamboo and banana, flitted past. Canoes darted hither and thither among the drifts of pestiferous weed (introduced from Java by a Siamese Queen who liked its pretty purple flower). Here and there were floating markets, sampans and canoes jammed together in immense rafts, their lady occupants bargaining noisily. The houses began to pack closer along the banks, small pagodas appeared, go-downs and wharfs. The river traffic grew denser. Busy launches, crowded sampans and ferries slid from shore to shore. Tugs churned up the muddy waters, dragging snaky strings of rice barges, and out in midstream lay steamers of all nations, their cargo-winch rattling.

Twenty minutes later a pleasant Siamese official



WESTWARD



was asking for my papers. He glanced at them, stamped them and with a bow returned them to me. All was in order.

"Hold on," said I. "Surely you want to know if we have varicose veins in our family; whether or not my grandmother was hung for sheep-stealing; my convictions, prison and religious, and who killed Cock Robin?"

Smiling, he assured me that he was not the least interested.

"Then you have not grasped the rudiments of the great passport game, as we enlightened Westerners play it," said I. "Shake, brother, shake!"

CHINA SEAS

(Not to be taken too seriously by responsible navigators)

Golden Bank shimmers deep under the tide.

Marble Rock glimmers, a ghost in the fog.

Gauze Isle's diaphanous, fit for a bride,

Black Isle's funereal, fit for a dog.

Seven Stars sparkle and *Emerald* glitters,

Mouse Island's smelly and swarms with the critters.

Wizard Reef magics with *Waterwitch Rock*,

Brazen Drum merrily wallops its gong.

Dutch Folly revels till four of the clock,

But *Nightingale Island* is thrilling with song—

Nightingale Island, Nightingale Island

Is shaking with song.

Starling Patch twitters to *Sandpiper Reef*

Charlotte Bank curtsies to *Margaret Shoal*.

The *Urn* and the *Coffin* are sodden with grief.

St. John and *St. Peter* are saving a soul.

Mandarin's Cap needs a bright yellow button.

Petit Cochon is a plump little glutton.



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



Sit the *Three Kings* with *Three Crowns* on their heads.
Great Pirate rollicks with rum and dubloon.
Mother and Child are asleep in their beds,
But *Nightingale Island*, she wakes to the moon—
Nightingale Island, Nightingale Island,
She trills to the moon.

CHAPTER XXIII

BANGKOK

I am that human pest, a hearty breakfaster. Given the run of my teeth at reveille and the earth is my footstool, the ocean my wash-pot. At my first breakfast in Bangkok the boy offered me the choice of kedgerree, sausages, kidneys, ham, bacon, eggs—fried, boiled or scrambled, supported by cereals, grapefruit, bananas, oranges, mangosteens, butter, toast and marmalade. After months of dry rolls and coffee this sudden plenitude overcame me and I believe I wept. Recovering, I ordered the whole issue and strode out, singing loudly, determined to call on the king and congratulate him on his country—fortunately a friend sidetracked me into the United Club and quieted me down. As these repasts continued day after day my experience of Siam may appear a trifle roseate, but it couldn't be helped. Day after day I determined to sally forth breakfastless and get the darker side of the picture. But my resolve invariably weakened at the dining-room door and a glance at that menu finished it—"kedgerree, sausages, kidneys, eggs fried, boiled or scrambled."

The first known capital of Siam was Lophburie, which in 1349 was succeeded by Ayuthia. When in 1767 the Burmese advanced to capture "invincible" Ayuthia for the third time, a general called Phya Tak was sent to oppose them. He, however, considering his forces inadequate, marched rapidly in the opposite direction and while the Burmese spoiled Ayuthia he

looted Chantaboon. It is hardly necessary to state that this gentleman was of Chinese extraction. Gaining in wealth and strength, he made himself king in Bangkok (prior to this an insignificant river port) and attacking the Burmans drove them from the country. It was he also who brought the famous "emerald" Buddha from Laos to be the chief glory of the city. But as he had betrayed his royal master, he, too, met his Brutus. In his latter years he conceived the idea that he was divine. Whereupon his close friend and minister, Chao Phaja Chakkri, cut his head off to prove that he wasn't, and, reigning in his stead, founded the present dynasty.

Bangkok has been described as "The city of magnificent distances," which is another way of saying that it takes half an hour to get anywhere. It is spattered along the east bank of the Menam for eight miles and crisscrossed every few yards by little canals known as *klongs*, which are bordered with yellow, orange and scarlet cana-lilies and overhung by flame-tipped flamboyants. Barges, sampans and canoes pursue their business upon these gay waterways—while there is water in them. When there isn't, all hands descend and grope in the mud for fish. Fish tickling is a sport no Siamese can resist. When the feeling comes over them they must tickle or bust. A government minister told me he had seen prominent Court ladies don their oldest clothes and wallow about in the slime like water buffaloes in the hopes of picking up a prawn or two.

In the stiller ditches, out in the suburbs, grows the pink lotus (dyed, they say, with the blood of Siva, when Kamadeva—Cupid—wounded him with a love arrow) and the huge floating plates of the Victoria Regia lily. In the gardens are refreshing green lawns, great mounds of purple bougainvillea and rows of



BANGKOK



travellers' palms outspread like giant peacock-tails.

The Siamese enhance the natural colour by the cheerfulness of their nether garments. On their upper halves they wear nothing worth mentioning, but lower down is the universal *panung*, some yards of cloth hitched round the waist with one corner drawn between the legs and tucked in behind; looking, at a distance, like voluminous knickerbockers, but of crimson, maroon or apple-green. Again there are always the priests in their vivid mustard-yellow.

The Chinese do the heavy work in Bangkok and the Siamese let them—proving the moral superiority of the former and the mental superiority of the latter, consciousness of which is evident on every smiling face. The grooms are Malays, the *gharri* drivers Tamils, the resplendent gatekeepers Punjabis. The storekeepers and butchers come from Canton, the house-boys from Hainan, the rickshaw coolies from Swatow. It is said that all the bad rickshaws in the East go to Bangkok when they die, there to suffer a purgatory of being dragged through the streets, wheels wobbling drunkenly, creaking in every rheumatic joint. Nevertheless, the rickshaw coolies of Siam, though they invariably land you at the wrong destination, bear you thither at a good speed, upset you with a fine flourish and charge little for it. You tell the boy to take you to the club. He repeats your instructions, nods cheerfully, radiates intelligence and, providing his vehicle doesn't come apart *en route*, drops you in the middle of a Chinese funeral.

Rickshaw driving in Bangkok is an adventure, it gets you into the most surprising places. Hearing that a friend was down with heat-stroke I bade a rickshaw-boy take me to the nursing home. We arrived at a large building and the boy waved me in. This was the



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



place. Sure thing! There was nobody in the hall, so I went upstairs. A white girl with a brown pigtail bobbed out of a door, goggled at me and bobbed back again, slamming the door. A second girl with a black pigtail appeared from another room. I knew her. She was a pretty little *métisse* from Nha-trang. "*Bon jour, Julie!*" I hallooed, in my noisy way. She, too, bolted back into her burrow and slammed the door. I might have been a she-wolf with cubs and a gumboil, from the aversion I created. I began to wonder if I had broken out all over spots, or had come out without my trousers.

The next to appear was a grim old Mother Superior, followed by a couple of nuns.

"What do you want?" she snapped, in French.

"I want my friend Mr. Arrol-Robinson."

"Mister?"

"Undoubtedly Mister."

"But this is a convent."

"Sorry!" said I, sliding down the banisters.

On another occasion I was more fortunate. A friend and I were returning, somewhat late, from a party when it occurred to us—it was devilish hot—that we could mingle lovingly with some beer. We told the boys where to go, but they naturally took us to quite another place. However, its proprietor declared that he had what we wanted and we went inside, into a room in which were several polite little Japanese women and a few Malays, squatting on the floor in their *sarongs* and tattoo-marks. We were swallowing the beer when a prosperous, middle-aged Chinaman entered, from another room, a trifle the worse for wear but most gentlemanly.

"Sir," said he to me, "you will pardon the impertinence, but I take it you are a Britisher."



"No impertinence at all," said I. "People are always taking me for a Britisher, and, funnily enough, I am."

"Then will you allow me the pleasure of singing you a Scotch song complete with appropriate gestures, accent and idiom?"

"Man," said I, "I should be tickled stiff."

And sing he did, Harry Lauder's *The Reason Why I Wear a Kilt*, complete with appropriate gestures, accent and idiom—though whether or not they would have been recognised in Scotland is another matter—delivering the classic with enormous spirit and finishing up with what I presume was intended for a Highland fling. All the while the Japanese and Malays sat quiet as mice, their eyes wide with wonderment—as were my own, for it was a truly astonishing performance.

Pedro de Sa, the Portuguese, writing in the seventeenth century, says of the Siamese: "Their diversions are chiefly hunting of Elephants, cock-fighting, and mock-fights by Elephants; they have comedies, rope-dancing and tumbling; and the King himself has been known to please himself with the flying of a Kite and a lanthorn at its tail. They have also other social diversions, which they call Cone, Laycone and Rabam . . . the Siamese on these occasions sing as well as dance; the men wear sugar-loaf-caps, and they who have not nails long enough by nature, adorn their finger ends with copper nails of a considerable length, which is accounted a great perfection. To these I may add, their running of oxen, their rowing for wages."

To these I (Mr. Garstin) may add a sort of football, called *takraw*; a painful sort of boxing; kite-fighting; cricket-fighting; fish-fighting and the running of horses for what can be got out of it. Kite-fighting is



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



so popular that the southwest wind is called "Lom Wow," or "The kite-flying wind." The Pramane Ground, close to the Palace, is the usual battle-field, but at the time I was there the late king's funeral pyre was being erected on the Pramane and the kite-flyers had shifted outside the city limits, whither, one blustering Sunday, I followed them. There were six pairs of kites in the air, big and little; to each Goliath a David. The small kites were flown by two men only. The big kites had a whole host of attendants: the owner who directed its flight, a heavy-weight who sat on the fair-lead to keep it down, and lastly a pack of men and boys who, were the kite threatened, laid hold of the string and fled, the frantic owner hurling abuse (and his hat) at them.

My Portuguese cicerone got so excited as to become inarticulate in three languages and it was impossible to follow his rendering of the rules, but as far as I could understand the big kite's object was to entangle the little chap and drag it home by sheer weight, while that of the smaller was to rip up or cut off the bigger. However that may be, it was a pretty sight, the shining white specks manœuvring and swooping, fighting like eagles for the supremacy of the blue. The big kites now retreating on the run, now leaping upwards for a stranglehold; the little kites darting and dipping, twisting over and over, humming as they whirled.

The same Portuguese (descendant, I suppose, of one of Perreira's or de Seixas' heroes—though he did not look it) conducted me stealthily to an abode of sin in the suburbs. I say abode of sin because cock-fighting is strictly forbidden and this was a cock-pit, a big shed of palm and bamboo. In the centre was the pit, surrounded by tiers of raised benches. In a bamboo cage an old native squatted, staring at rows of glass jam-



jars. Other natives sat on benches, also crystal-gazing. War-worn game-cocks, "bloody but unbowed," crowed defiance at each other from rattan coops. But there was no cock-fighting that afternoon. The proprietor of this sanguinary establishment, a plump, benign Malay, simply clad in a *sarong* and steel spectacles, came forward murmuring apologies. There had been some trouble about stake money, so they were matching fish instead.

We went into the bamboo cage and consulted the old man. He spent his life in there, I was told, squatting on his hunkers, shifting the jam-jars about to discover which of their occupants particularly hated the sight of each other. Two irritable little gladiators, neither of them much more than an inch long, were chosen and put together into a jar.

The effect was instantaneous and magical. From dark steel colour they changed to deep purple, their fins flushed bright crimson and they rushed at each other. For a second they were tangled up like wild-cats, then one broke away with a piece of the other in its mouth and rose to the surface chewing it furiously, spat it out, and charged again.

So it went on, a pause, a rush, a whirl of glowing purple bodies and blood-red fins, a snap, a wrench and another pause for breath. Malays, Chinese, Siamese gathered round, betting briskly. The fat proprietor waddled about, beaming through his spectacles, benign as some old tabby.

The little daughter of a Siamese prince was bitten by a mad dog and died of hydrophobia. Her parents, instead of abandoning themselves to useless grief, took the nobler part and moved heaven and earth to get a branch of the Pasteur Institute established in Bangkok. Their efforts were successful, and overlooking the di-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



rector's desk is a bust of the little princess whose agony has saved countless others. But there is no sign of pain on the sculptured face; it is serene and smiling. The director doubtless finds it a source of inspiration; but, to my thinking, it would be better placed in the hall, where scores of afflicted people congregate daily, to smile their terrors away.

A native doctor led me out to a shed containing quantities of Russell's vipers, coiled up like shiny ropes and hissing like extinct syphons; also a number of rabbits stretched in deathly trances. The rabbits were inoculated with rabies, he explained. If they died in three or five days they were thrown away, but if in four exactly their spinal-cords were extracted and boiled down for virus. In my country the white witches used to swear by a nostrum made from the thigh-bone of a male badger, which, if I remember, had to be captured in the first of the moon. It would appear, though we never guessed it, that they were working along scientific lines.

From the shed we went out to the snake pits, two large concrete basins with beehive hatches set in rows, and water-filled ditches running round the insides. In the first pit was only one visible reptile, a hamadryad, the most deadly snake on earth, ten feet long and thick as a man's arm, taking his morning swim. The second pit, however, boiled with snakes, cobras swimming and cobras basking, piled up in writhing heaps, chasing the scared frogs about or sitting up swinging their wicked heads. And in the midst of them a man walked, bare-footed. It was like some horrid nightmare. One could imagine oneself, in one's wildest dreams, shut in a pit like that, surrounded by hooded deaths hissing and swaying. But the man didn't worry at all; he puffed a cigarette, in fact, and overturning the hives



picked up forkloads of snakes at the end of a pronged stick with the dexterity of an Italian handling spaghetti and bundled them into the water for exercise. They rose at him, swaying to and fro, inflating their spectacled hoods, their tongues darting. He gave them, at the most, a push with his stick, as who should say, "Don't be silly!"

To my astonishment, the doctor dropped over the barrier and joined him—in a *panung* and no socks! A cobra reared at him, flicking out like a watch-spring. He took no more notice of it than if it had been filled with rose-water, and conferred with the snake-man, who, selecting a lusty black specimen, jerked it out of the water by the tail. The pair held the six-foot, struggling devil between them and inserting a glass plate between its barbed jaws, squeezed it dry. Three or four big brutes they milked that morning, milked them like dairy cows. The doctor rejoined me, a dozen colourless drops on the plate.

"Enough for to-day," he said.

"But hang it, man! How dare you?" said I. "Aren't you afraid of being bitten? Those vicious brutes . . ."

He shook his head. "Vicious—oh, no! Now the hamadryad, or king cobra, is . . ."

"But, dash it, all cobras are vicious and deadly. Everybody knows it!"

"The king cobra, or hamadryad . . ."

"Oh, to blazes with the hamadryad! I'm talking of those cobras, *Naia tripudians*, *kala nag*, ordinary cobras."

He smiled. "Ah, yes, *ordinary* cobras—but" (with a note of pride) "you must remember *our* cobras are domesticated."



Domestic cobras! My soul!

It was the famous linked Siamese twins (actually their father was a Chinaman) who put modern Siam on the map, but beyond a faded photograph of these inseparables, *and their children*, in the Bangkok mu-



Owed its singularity to whitewash.

seum the ungrateful country has no memorial. They deserve a statue at least. After twins one naturally associates Siam with white elephants. These, at any rate, have no reason to complain—but the one disappointing thing about them is that they are not white. "Lord" George Sanger, the circus peer, who toured "the only white elephant ever exhibited in Europe,"



later admitted that it owed its singularity to white-wash.

The question of deciding whether an elephant is white or not is so nice that only a committee of experts can decide. If the beast cannot substantiate its claims it becomes a common drudge in the teak forests, and is prodded with goads and hammered on the corns. But if, on the other hand, it passes the tests it is a made elephant. It is created a grandee of the first rank with titles such as "Gem of the Sky," "Glory of the Land," "Earth Leveller;" maintained sumptuously in life, and in death honoured with national mourning. The reason for this veneration is that Buddha, in the form of a white elephant, slipped into the body of a virtuous queen, called Mayé, issuing ten months later from her right side, and to this day white elephants are held to be the incarnation of some future Gaudama.

In 1548 the King of Pegu considered the possession of a white elephant to be of sufficient importance to take the field with nine hundred thousand men and violently extract four from his cousin of Siam. In 1855 the King of Siam sent a tuft of white elephant hairs to Queen Victoria as a mark of his special esteem.

In 1878 the Brahmin astrologers attached to the court predicted that the current reign would be prosperous and that plenty of white elephants would be caught, the former depending on the latter. In Laos the hunters went to work with a will and captured a big mud-plastered bull, which, on being scrubbed, proved to be the real Simon Pure. The whole nation, from king to coolie, sat up and rejoiced. His Majesty even went to Ayuthia to meet the prodigy. It was rafted down to Bangkok, surrounded by gilded state barges and boatloads of musicians in full blast. The capital was rigged out with flags and decorations. All



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



the nobility, gentry and canaille turned out to welcome it in their party *panungs*; also a deputation of priests, who read an address of which the following are extracts:

"Most powerful angels, we entreat you to assemble now, in order that you may prevent all evil to His Majesty the King of Siam, and also to this magnificent elephant which has recently arrived. . . . We also beg that you will incline this elephant to listen to the words of instruction and comfort that we now deliver. Most Royal Elephant! We beg that you will not think too much of your father and mother, your relatives and friends. We beg that you will not regret leaving your native mountains and forest, because there are evil spirits there that are very dangerous; and wild beasts that howl, making a fearful noise; and there, too, is the big bird which hovers round and often picks up elephants and eats them; and there are bands of cruel hunters who kill elephants for their ivory. We trust that you will not return to the forest, for you would be in constant danger. And that is not all: In the forest you would have no servants, and it is very unpleasant to sleep with the dust and filth adhering to your body, and where the flies and mosquitoes are troublesome.

"Brave and noble Elephant! . . . Look at this delightful place, this heavenly city! It abounds in wealth and in everything your eyes could wish to see or your heart desire to possess. It is of your own merit that you have come to behold this beautiful city, to enjoy its wealth and to be the favourite guest of His Most Exalted Majesty the King." *

"Ahurrrumph!" said the elephant—in other words, "Lead on!"

* Miss Cort's translation.



BANGKOK



There were a couple of revered creatures in Bangkok when I was there, lodged in roomy stables behind the Throne Hall. Though by no stretch of the imagination could they be called white, they were certainly paler than is usual and had pinkish eyes and flesh-coloured freckles about their ears and foreheads. The bigger of the two was most civil. I bought him some sugar-cane and he replied by touching his forehead and giving off soft rumbles of thanks, a gentleman every yard of him. The smaller was not so well-behaved. He was in a shed by himself, unattended, his shackles reinforced by extra lashings. I should have been warned by those precautions, but I was not. I wished him "Good-day," made some trivial observation about the weather and slung him a bunch of sugar-cane. Bang! Something hit me in the face with the force of a fire hose, drenching me from head to foot—he had sneezed all over me! The *mahouts* came running and were full of concern. I should not have ventured in there alone, they said, His Reverence was out of temper that morning.

Drying myself in the sun I told them what I thought of their future Buddha.

NOCTURNE

The Queen was in her parlour, with maids to serve her needs,
Eating turtle eggs and tamarinds and roasted lotus seeds.
The Prince was at the ballet, a flower in his curls,
Throwing yellow champa blossoms to the golden dancing girls,
With their moonlike powdered faces and their lips of painted
red.

His sisters, the Princesses, were, most properly, in bed.
The concubines were bathing in the harem lily ponds
Where fireflies hung like jewels on the trailing willow fronds.
The Somdetch was in parliament with all the mandarins,



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



Except the Lord High Jamarat—in prison, for his sins.
The Wanglang in the citadel was popping off his guns
To scare the djinns that prowl by night, the black, malignant
ones.

The *pras* in the pagodas were nodding at their prayers.
The Brahmins in the gilded *wats* were fast asleep at theirs.
The Elephant ("Earth Leveller") was sunk in melancholy,
He smelt the jungle-scented breeze—and wished he weren't
so holy.

The Chinese in their gambling dens were playing at fan-tan.
The Portugese, in garrison, were dicing to a man.
The Dutchman in their factories were swigging Van der Hum.
The English on their brigantines were singing at their rum.
The fisher-folk were burning joss along the Menam bars.
And lovers, as in other lands, were gazing at the stars.

But where was the King? O!

"Radiance of the World"

"Lord of Creation"

"Defender of the Faith"

The Most Exalted,

Most Potent

Divine Personage?

Where, O! where was he?

Where could he be?

Ah-ha!

Out in the garden, in the April gale,
Flying a kite,
In the night,
With a light
At its tail.

CHAPTER XXIV

BANGKOK (*Continued*)

A stronghold of the Buddhist faith, Bangkok is stuck as thick with pagodas as a duff with plums, but though much celestial merit is gained by building a *wat*, little comes of maintaining it and consequently most of them are dropping to pieces. Four only are kept in any sort of order and are worth mentioning, Wat Saket, Wat Cheng, Wat Pra Keo and Wat Poh. When the Siamese moved the capital from Ayuthia to Bangkok they did so literally, transferring the very bricks—which, in truth, was about all the Burmese left them. The number of bricks a man carried was in proportion to his conduct. If he were of good character he got off with a hundred or so, but if of bad the burden rose by thousands. An Englishman who had been many years in the country told me that in his early days families were still assessed by the number of bricks carried by their ancestors.

"A ten-thousand brick family, my dear," one Siamese lady would remark to another, sniffing, as who should say, "The grandfather sold cats' meat." Speaking from conjecture, I should say they brought down far too many bricks for the city's need, so, not knowing what to do with them, stacked them up in a heap, stuck a pagoda on top and with the Oriental proclivity for calling a spade a steam-shovel, dubbed it "The Golden Mountain." Though no more golden than is usual with mud bricks, and missing mountainous proportions by some thousands of feet, it really is



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



a considerable hillock, its flanks honeycombed with fantastic grottoes and tunnels, the whole overgrown with scrub, moss and creepers.

Exploring one of these dark, mysterious alleys, I all but trod on a cobra. Without waiting to ascertain whether or not it was one of the domestic dairy sort waiting to be milked I dabbed it on the nose with a brick and explored no further. The pagoda on the summit was locked on the day of my visit, which did not distress me much, as one pagoda is apt to be very much like another, but the view over Bangkok was very fine with the shining Menam winding away to the north and the glazed spires of innumerable *wats* glittering, many-coloured in the sunshine.

Not so many years ago, well within living memory, a host of carrion crows, mouldy vultures and mangy pariahs haunted the artificial crags and crevices of The Golden Mountain, fulfilling a public service. Poor people unable to afford elaborate funeral rites brought their dead to the *talapoins*, who laid them on a slab, chopped them up, and whistled down the undertakers. With a whirl of dingy wings and a flash of yellow bodies, vultures and pariahs descended from their haunts, tearing and rending. My Portuguese, Senhor Anunciacao Jaymé da Cunha, had spent many of his childhood's sunniest hours watching the tug o' war between vulture and pariah. He described it to me with enormous gusto one morning in the Ayuthia train and in the endeavour to act, simultaneously, the parts of dog, bird and corpse (with, as it were, a watching brief for the carrion crow) wrenched all the buttons off his tunic and had to spend the rest of the day fixed up with safety-pins.

Nowadays the dead are burned at Wat Saket, the grimy pagodas at its base serving as crematoriums.



Within are frescoes depicting the sort of entertainment the wicked may expect hereafter. The Buddhist hells (there are one hundred and thirty-six, major and minor) are, however, more hopeful than is ours, for their punishments are not everlasting, the *pras* maintaining that ten million years of roasting, flaying, impaling, etc., will atone for a skid or two on earth.

Wat Cheng stands on the west bank of the Menam and is the oldest and most imposing monument in the capital. It consists of a tall central *prang*, or tower, surrounded by four lesser sisters. The Siamese, to whom the gilding of the lily is a matter of course, call it "The Porcelain Pagoda," and seen from a distance, in the full light of morning, it certainly has the appearance of being made of coloured china. Climb its precipitous steps and you will see how the trick is done. The flowery festoons and devices with which it is caked from top to bottom are nothing but odds and ends of broken crockery embedded in the cement. A flower is formed of a cracked soup-plate, a chipped dinner-plate and a splintered saucer, superimposed; a bud, of a fractured breakfast-cup with a broken egg-cup inside. To decorate the immense surface of Wat Cheng they must have combed all the rubbish-heaps of the world.

Wat Pra Keo is inside the palace grounds and, as befits the Pagoda Royal, is the most opulent of all. The cloisters are painted with scenes from the ubiquitous Râmâyana. The courts are planted with flowering shrubs and crowded with little pavilions, with stone horses and Korean lions with rolling pebbles for tongues, with fabulous birds and griffins in bronze. There is a mutilated Buddha from Benares and a nasty Ganesa (the elephant-headed son of Siva) from Java, squatting fatly on a pedestal, a girdle of skulls about his swollen paunch. At each gate stands a ferocious



giant, fifteen feet high, his tusks up-curling like a wild boar's, encrusted from tip to toe with sparkling mosaic. And in and out among them go the yellow-robed *pras*, and Palace servants in their neat white jackets and *panungs* of royal blue.



The Mosaic Giant.

Everywhere are *chedis*, those campanula spires, and they, too, are sheathed in polished glass mosaic. In one place there is a double row of twelve, each of a different hue, gold, ruby, yellow, azure, violet and so on. In the burning sunlight they flash skyward like so many pointed flames; the glitter of them is unbearable to the eye.

The temples carry mosaic towers; their roofs are of glazed tiles, red or green, the gables tipped with gilded horns (as in Cambodia), at the eave corners dangle

jingling wind-bells. The walls are coated from top to bottom with a bas-relief of variegated glass mosaic—angels, Garudas, woman-headed birds, flowers in conventional patterns and garlands. The doorways are elaborately carved, fretted and gilded; the doors lacquered and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Under the ardent sun the gilding shines forth dazzlingly and every chip of mosaic flashes back its piercing ray till the whole place seems to be coated in fiery gems, sheathed in refulgent gold.

One building shelters the royal library, of which many volumes are of palm-leaf, neatly bound with the edges gilded. The decorative Pali script is etched with an iron stylus and a black powder rubbed in.

In another building, the most gorgeous of all, sits the famous "Emerald Buddha" on a throne of shining gold thirty-four feet high, surrounded by a host of lesser albeit sufficiently precious images, the price of any one of which would keep me quiet for years. Like his compeer of Phnom-Penh, the Buddha is not emerald at all, but jasper. The image, I should say at a guess, is about eighteen inches high and is dressed up in collars and belts and bangles of diamonds, rubies and all manner of precious stones. He has three suits which he wears separately, according to season—and so have I, for that matter.

Though Wat Pra Keo is the most magnificent, it was to Wat Poh that I went most often; so often, in fact, that the lodge-keeper's cat regarded me with suspicion and took to doing the rounds with me. It had a short tail, curled like a corkscrew, that cat, but whether it was natural or the result of getting mixed up in something I was not in a position to ask and it must remain a mystery.

Wat Poh occupies some acres of ground and, like



Pra Keo, it is cut up into courts and dotted with pagodas, pavilions and *chedis*. But it is less crowded, less blindingly brilliant; the mosaic is tarnished and dropping out, weeds sprout between the red flagstones, and there tuberoses grow, oleanders, yellow honeysuckle and a form of passion flower called by the Siamese the bell-flower. There are also jack-fruit and fig-trees and still larger trees spreading friendly green umbrellas between you and the smiting sun. A restful, shady, flower-scented place, gently decaying, little frequented excepted for little black-and-white Dominicans which sing very prettily in the tamarind-boughs, and barren women who want families and fancy a certain curious stone in the gardens can be of assistance.

At each of the outer gates stand two stone giants brought from China a couple of centuries ago, awesome great fellows, twelve feet high, with trailing whiskers, dragon buckles and threatening maces. Guarding an inner gate are four giants who are unmistakably European. They have round, bulging eyes, bulbous noses, chipped beards and their curly heads are crowned with monumental pot-hats. Ourselves as the Chinese see us! I learned that they represented early Dutch traders, but nobody could tell me why or when they were erected.

In 1663 the Netherlands East India Company, which was carrying on a very valuable trade with Siam, considered a treaty had been violated and withdrew their factors. The Siamese, finding commerce at a standstill, had to go to Batavia, hat in hand, and beg them to come back. I can only guess that these amusing giants were put up in celebration of the return.

There are also at Wat Poh cloisters stuffed with gilt Buddhas as like as currant buns, goldfish basins studded with fantastic islets, and many little shrub-grown rock-



eries surmounted by stone pagodas of doll's-house size. Stone priests sit in meditation in miniature grottoes. Comic stone beasts with heads like goats or bulldogs and imbecile expressions leer at you between the cactus-leaves. These rockeries represent the Delectable Mountains where the gods live.

There are scores of entertaining little statues scattered about Wat Poh, hiding slyly under orange-bushes, or tucked away in forgotten, spider-infested corners—the litter of Ayuthia. Every time I went there we routed out some fresh little beast or manikin, I and that cat—Fu-dogs (surely the ancestor of my lord the Pekinese), laughing cavaliers bestriding horses and buffaloes, jovial Chinese revellers, pigs, camels, and monkeys. One monkey squats on its hunkers, grasping a cokernut in one hand, scratching its head with the other, wondering how the deuce to get inside that nut. The puzzlement on the creature's face is enough to stir the dead to laughter.

The statue I liked best of all is of a merry little Chinese lady seated on a led horse, playing a guitar. She wears a high Manchu headdress and a flowing robe which sweeps down on each side of her mount. She reminded me of Queen Elizabeth riding down to Tilbury and I called her "Gloriana" and paid my respects daily—also the cat.

The popular *pièce de résistance* of Wat Poh is the Great Buddha. This monster has a pagoda to himself, and needs it, for he is no less than one hundred and sixty feet long, or nearly three times the length of Hendrik Hudson's *Half Moon*, and as far as is known, more than twice that of the ship in which da Gama doubled the Cape of Good Hope or Drake went round the world. Apart from his huge bulk and his nacre-inlaid feet, there is nothing to commend the image: he

卐 THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS 卐

is just a crude mass of masonry, gilded from end to end. The Pilot Book places gold-leaf second in the list of Siamese imports and my only wonder is that it is not placed first, with some lengths to spare. The Buddha is discovered reclining, head propped on hand, in the state of Nirvana, or blessed oblivion—a state in which I am often discovered myself, especially after lunch.

CHAPTER XXV

AYUTHIA

Like many great men, I do not require much sleep; a steady nine or ten hours at night and a nap or two during the day will keep me as fresh as a dewy violet—but that much I must have. When, after returning from a dance at two A.M., I was aroused at five by my Chinamen cackling like a guinea-hen on one side of the bed and Senhor A. J. da Cunha warbling like a turkey-cock on the other, I was not altogether my sunny self. Thinking the hotel must be on fire, I got out of bed quickly enough, to find all they wanted was that I should go to Ayuthia. Too dazed to resist, I removed my lower jaw with a razor, tumbled into some clothes and was conducted bleeding and yawning to the station.

The Siamese railways are credits to the energetic prince who controls them. The train that does the long run through Southern Siam will hold its own with anything of its kind on earth, but it is impossible for an average European to sleep comfortably in their day-coaches; the benches are too short and the racks too narrow. I tried both, in every position, stretched out, bent double, curled up and tied in a knot; but it was useless. Senhor da Cunha, seeing that something would have to be done or he'd have me falling asleep on top of him in the public places of Ayuthia, removed his toupee, scratched his head and got an idea out of it. He opened the carriage window.

"Incline topside *banco* and pendulate limbs without, sar!" said he brightly.



Thus, stretched on the seat, both legs sticking out of the window, I fared to Ayuthia, getting in the necessary three or four hours' slumber and arriving dewy as a violet.

Ayuthia was founded by King Chao Uthong ("The Prince with the Golden Cradle") and given by him a native name signifying "The capital, home of the Gods, holy, invincible, exalted above all others, refuge of the world"—and there are people who complain that little Welsh Llandefaelogfach and Llandyssiligogo are mouthfuls! From here, in the days of Chinese suzerainty, went ambassadors to Peking, bearing tribute that reads like the cargoes brought to Solomon by the ships of Tarshish—black bears, white apes, peacock-tails, ivory, rhinoceros-horns, feathers of the blue swallow, tortoise-shell, sapanwood—getting presents in return of such things as a silver-gilt seal shaped like a camel and a hundred copies of the "History of the Eminent Women of China." In 1753 Siam put forward the peculiar request for some ginseng, some long-haired oxen (yaks) and some eunuchs—but got only the ginseng.

To Ayuthia came the first European adventurers and ambassadors, the latter borne in state upriver in royal barges "of an incredible size, tastefully ornamented and gilded in relief, each pulled by seventy or eighty rowers." The Portuguese came first. In 1511 Don Alfonso d'Albuquerque, the mighty Captain-General of the Indies, then plugging round-shot at the Sultan of Malacca, sent one Duarte Fernandez to Ayuthia in a Chinese junk. He was well received and the following year an ambassador proper was despatched. From then on, the Portuguese flocked to Siam, rose to high military positions and even formed a royal bodyguard, serving their employer with devo-



tion in a hemisphere where cunning is preferred to courage and fidelity regarded as the attribute of dogs.

In 1548 the Burmese and Peguans besieged Ayuthia, with little success. The King of Pegu then tried to bribe the sturdy Portuguese who were the backbone of



An imposing mission.

the defence, but met with the proud reply that "all the gold in the world would not seduce them; that while they were alive he should not enter the city; and that even after they were all dead and cut to pieces, if it might be, they would still defend it." And they were as good as their word; Ayuthia was held inviolate—



that time. The descendants of these heroes remain to this day, a sadly deteriorated, mongrel crew.

An imposing French mission, dispatched by Louis XIV, arrived with much flag-wagging and trumpet-blowing in 1685, and, thanks to the efforts of the acting Barcalon, Constatine Phaulcon, was favourably received. The emissary, de Chaumont, has left a most interesting account of his audience.* For fabulous magnificence Ayuthia of those days must have rivalled even the courts of the Great Moguls. He was paraded through streets and courts lined with soldiers and war-elephants to the music of "trumpets, drums, cymbals, bagpipes, small bells and horns" which he found "very noisy." The royal horses, he says, "had golden rings upon their forefeet . . . all their trappings were so richly adorned with gold and silver, pearls, rubies and diamonds, that the leather was entirely covered, their stirrups and saddles being of gold and silver. In the same court were elephants harnessed like carriage-horses, the trappings being of crimson velvet, with gilt buckles." He reports that the King wore "a crown enriched with diamonds, fastened to a cap such as is worn by our dragoons. His vest was of a rich material, with flowers wrought in gold, diamonds being set round the neck and wrists, which had the effect of a necklace and bracelets. This prince wore also many diamonds on his fingers. . . . During the audience there were eighty mandarins in the saloon, all prostrate, with their faces on the ground. . . . M. Constance afterwards took me over the rest of the palace; and I saw the white elephant, whose food and drink are served up in golden vases."

This minister, Constance (Phaulcon), was a remark-

* *Extrait de la Relation de M. le Chevalier de Chaumont.* Paris, 1687.



able man. Of Venetian origin, born in Greece, he served for many years with the English East India Company. Striking out for himself, he suffered the wreck of his ship and fortunes on the Malabar coast. He slept under a bush that night and walking the sea-shore next morning met with another castaway in even worse plight than himself. This person proved to be no less than the Siamese ambassador to Persia. With what money was left to him, Phaulcon helped the destitute diplomat home to Ayuthia, was rewarded with a place at Court, where he made himself so useful (first by auditing the bills of the palace caterers) that he speedily rose to the highest power. Under his guardian wing the French emissaries were treated to receptions, banquets, elephant hunts and fights and went their way—but they left behind them a powerful force, ostensibly to protect Siam from the machinations of the Dutch.

Phaulcon was born in the Catholic faith, but while in England he did as the English and became an Anglican. On the appearance of Jesuits in Siam he swung back with the double fervour of a regenerated turncoat and built the first Christian church in Lophburie. According to Sir John Bowring, it was still standing in 1855, but with an image of Buddha squatting on the altar under the inscription "*Jesus Hominum Salvator!*" For this and other pious acts Phaulcon has been fulsomely praised by contemporary missionaries; but the Jesuits of those days would confessedly countenance anything, "*Ad majorem Dei gratiam,*" and it is beyond doubt that he was the agent of Louis, and that the real object of the French troops was to add yet another ray to the crown of *le Roi-Soleil*.

The King lay sick to death, having nominated his adopted son (Phaulcon's cat's-paw) as his successor,



and all was ripe for a *coup d'état*, when a mandarin called Pitraxa upset the apple-cart. He suddenly roused the people, seized Phaulcon and the whole royal family and invested the French in Bangkok and Mergui. Phaulcon perished miserably. In the words of the old chronicler, "When he [Pitraxa] had continued him several hours to the torture he ordered the king's adopted son to be brought to the palace, and caused his head to be cut off immediately and a string run through it, and then to be hung about Monsieur Constance's neck in the manner of European cravats. This tragedy was enacted on the 28th of May [1688], the following 29th and 30th, Monsieur Constance was again applied to the torture, in the cruelest manner that could be devised, having the young prince's head always hanging on his breast night and day. Thus they continued to torment him till the 4th of June, that he expired under the violence of the torture."

The King having opportunely died, Pitraxa murdered his two brothers and caused the young princess "to be thrust into a large velvet sack; and her brains to be knocked out with great bars of sweet and so much esteemed wood in all the Indies, call'd *Aquila* and *Calamboar*; and then thrown in the river, it being accounted a profane thing, and a violation of the sacred respect due to a princess of the royal blood of Siam, to be put to death in the usual manner that others are; and they therefore did it with great deference and distinguishing ceremonies become her quality."

Very delicate feeling, I'm sure!

Failing either to entice the French out of their strongholds or reduce them, the usurper allowed them to sail away as they came, and that was the end of the *Grand Monarque's* grand schemes.

In 1717 came another magnificent embassy, this time



from "The Most High and Sovereign Royal Majesty of the Catholic King, Don Philip the Fifth, King of Spain," loaded with rich gifts and honeyed words. But while Don Gregorio Bustamente Bustillo was telling the Siamese what charming people the Spanish were to trade with, some Siamese traders were being abominably treated by the Spanish in Manila,* and that, too, came to naught.

All this time the Dutch and English, unassisted by



A tough crowd.

any pompous official overtures, had been quietly trading in Siam; that is to say, they behaved with comparative tranquillity within the kingdom, but did they meet at sea, went for each other with the ferocity of wild beasts—or commercial rivals. They were a tough, tenacious, loose-living crowd, these early traders, and must have had constitutions of brass to stand the climate plus the enormous quantities of liquor they appear

* *Historia General de las Filipinas*, Vol. 15.



to have consumed. Of the twenty-three sets of effects left by a Captain Udall (killed in Ayuthia in 1686 in a fight with Macassars) nine were drinkable. Mixed up with such oddments as perriwigs, tobacco-pipes, swords, silk stockings and butter are lots of "sherry, clarrett, rennish, beere, mummm, brandy, cases of sperits, sack and black cherry brandy."

Dr. Anderson gives a picture of a trader named White "without hat, slippers, or anything but his nightgown and a pair of drawers" being entertained aboard the ship of one Weltden "with plentiful supplies of liquor, each toast as it was drunk being ratified by a salute, the guns being loaded either with bullets or stones. No less than sixty-four shots were fired before the carousal was at an end and more would have followed had not the night been so wet.*" One can imagine trying to spend a quiet evening in Ayuthia when the foreigners were celebrating some popular birthday and the weather was dry!

But who in these days, sitting comfortably by his own fireside, shall condemn these old adventurers? Their lives were hard and precarious, their exile long, their temptations great—they paved the trade routes with their bodies. In the long commercial rivalry the Dutch held the upper hand for many years, but the British clung on and, thrashing them conclusively at sea, stripped them of every Eastern possession.

Ayuthia was taken by a Burmese-Peguan army in 1569, by the Peguans in 1633, and again in 1767 by the Burmese. Mendez Pinto, who was present during the abortive siege of 1548, gives a vivid account of the furious assaults: "All the elephants carried wooden castles on their backs, from whence they shot with muskets, brass culverins, and a great number of harque-

* *English Intercourse with Siam in the Sixteenth Century.*



buses . . . these guns made such a havoc of the besieged that in less than a quarter of an hour most of them were beaten down; the elephants withall setting their trunks to the target fences . . . tore them down in such sort, as not one of them remained entire. . . . We saw streams of blood running everywhere, and the air all of a light fire; there was also on either part such a tumult and noise, as one would have said the earth had been tottering; for it was a most dreadful thing to hear the discord and jarring of those barbarous instruments, as bells, drums and trumpets, intermingled with the noise of the great ordnance and smaller shot and the dreadful yelling of six thousand elephants, whence ensued so great a terror that it took from them that heard it both courage and sense; withall that place at the city gate, whereof the Braama had been master, was all covered over with bodies drowned in blood, a spectacle so horrible, that the very sight of it put us almost beside ourselves."

The siege of 1767 lasted two years. The Burmese broke in at length and ran amuck, burning and destroying, stripping the golden images, torturing, killing and enslaving the inhabitants, men, women and children. The city never recovered. Ayuthia, "the holy and invincible," was one with Troy and Nineveh.

Ayuthia achieved, Senhor da Cunha and I hired a sampan and were sculled down the Menam by a leisurely boatman who sucked cigarettes all day, expelling amazing volumes of smoke through his nostrils; he might have been ablaze within, like a dragon. It was a festival day and the world was flocking to the Phana-jaxing pagoda. All about us were boatloads of merry natives in their best and brightest *panungs*, scarlet, apple-green, purple, royal-blue and crimson. The



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



women wore the customary white camisole, but many of the men had shirts of buttercup-yellow and were belted with rainbow sashes. They sat shoulder to shoulder, packed tight along the gunwales, laughing and chattering; the sampans, each floating on its own clear reflection, looked like flower-boats for brilliant colour.

We drifted slowly downriver, past green banks of feathery bamboo and palm. Women wearing peculiar hats lifted high off their heads on cane erections, darted from boat to boat in minute canoes, offering for sale joss-sticks, horoscopes, gold-leaf and lotus-buds. Pushing through a swarm of sampans at the Phanajaxing jetty, we landed and entered the temple.

The great Buddha squats on a brick base and is about thirty feet high, his gilded face almost lost to view among the shadowy roof-beams. The pagoda buzzed like a beehive, was gay with flower offerings and reeking with incense. The faithful were burning joss-sticks by the fistful and plastering the huge folded legs with gold-leaf. Of reverence there was none; everybody chattered and laughed and pushed—and, as is usual in Siam, was good-nature itself.

Three fine Chinese ladies in embroidered jackets knelt before the idol, holding bits of wood shaped like beans. They kowtowed repeatedly. Then threw their arms above their heads several times and casting the beans aside examined them—and tried again. The Senhor told me that the way the beans fell foretold the future. I have seen Ba-quaina witch-doctors tossing human knuckle-bones with the same object. But with the simple African one toss must suffice, the die is cast. Not so the Chinese, apparently; they go on tossing till they get the fate they want—and very sensible, too!



Ayuthia is on an island formed by two branches of the Menam, which island is pitted with swamps, ponds and puddles, and intersected by innumerable *klongs*. The Burmese destroying the buildings and the Bangkokese removing the bricks, the Ayuthians have taken to the river and live either in spider-legged or floating dwellings along its banks. The Menam is its Main Street, the *klongs* its back alleys, the sampan its common vehicle. Inevitably it has been dubbed "The Oriental Venice."

Leaving the Wat, we took our leisurely way up what corresponds to the Grand Canal. All life and traffic is on the water. Everything that in other Eastern cities goes on wheels or legs here goes afloat. A child is taught to paddle before it learns to walk. One can imagine a proud mother writing, "Baby is marvellous! He has cut his eye-teeth, can say 'Momma' and 'Dadda' and paddle his own canoe." You see a school of these water babies, not one of them above five years old, racing their tiny shallops across the stream, dodging the traffic with the skill of London guttersnipes. Hawkers paddle from door to door crying their wares, sugar-cane, fruit, vegetables, lamp-oil; Chinese butchers with the morning's kill laid out on a plank before them; ambulant *restaurateurs* with brass pots smoking between their knees.

Both banks are lined with houseboats carried on log or bamboo rafts. Some are stores, opening always on the river, their front steps boat-ladders. Others are private houses, rich and poor. The former are very fine, built of rare woods, carved and inlaid, with shaded porches on which the owners take their ease. In most cases they were fast asleep; the sole exceptions, to my memory, were two white-headed old aristocrats, naked but for brilliant *sarongs*, bowed over a chessboard. Ba-



bies swung in hammocks from the rafters of the poorer craft; their mothers lay flat on their backs, chewing betel and kept the hammocks in gentle motion by means of strings tied to their big toes. When they feel hot, which is often, the Ayuthians simply flop overboard into the river, clothes and all, and soozle * there until cooled off.

We passed barges loaded with big red earthenware pots and others full of green cokernuts for curry-making; the bargees (male and female) were either soozling or stretched out on the decks in slumber. When we returned, some hours later, they were still slumbering or soozling. Naturally, those pots and nuts will not walk on and off the barges on their own account; somebody must work at them some time, but when, I know not.

As we have dedicated six days to toil and one to rest, the Ayuthian has probably reversed the order—which is, after all, the more agreeable arrangement. Never in my life have I seen so many people of every age, class and sex wallowing in such wholehearted, shameless indolence. Being bone-lazy myself, my heart went out to them.

We turned out of Main Street into a narrow back alley, Senhor da Cunha and myself, succumbing to the general torpor, reclining gracefully on the bottom of the sampan, the gondolier waking up every few minutes and giving it a push or two. The *klong* was only a few feet wide, bamboos and mango-trees almost met over head, forming a green tunnel pierced by long knitting-needles of sunlight.

Everybody was soozling—men, women, children and

* It has been pointed out to me that there is no such word as "soozle," but it strikes me as a very good word, and anyhow somebody has got to invent 'em.



beasts. We passed two babies, a dog and a pig, squatting side by side in the mud, only their heads protruding, and threaded a tortuous passage through a bevy of smiling girl heads. I chucked one gently under the chin as we drifted past. I simply couldn't help it; reflex action, I think they call it. The chin was within six inches of my trailing hand and a jolly little chin. The girl bubbled with laughter and splashed me with water, which was very cooling and most obliging of her.

We passed a duck-farm, pushing our prow through a scum of soozling ducks. A man stood waist-deep in midstream washing a new-born foal no bigger than a greyhound. He hauled the woolly infant out of the way and we floated on, to be promptly shipwrecked. Our bow rose up in the air, impelled by some aqueous upheaval and the sampan turned over on its side, dipping up bucketsful of water. Senhor A. J. da Cunha woke out of his trance, exclaiming, "*Crocodilo! Cristo!*" But it was not a crocodile, it was a horse! A bony yellow pony mare (evidently the foal's mamma) emerged from under the sampan and floundered ashore—she had been soozling too. We paddled on, speeded by howls of delight from the owner on the bank. That is the first time I have been shipwrecked on a horse. Life is full of novel experiences!

But the prettiest sight of all was a girl in a maroon *panung* standing out on a bough picking blossoms while at the tree-foot a gorgeous peacock strutted, his aureate fan-tail erect, his breast molten purple.

We landed and walked, the heat wrapping us like a blanket, to the site of the old palaces, now one vast desolation of tottering pillars, crumbling *chedis* and huge Buddhas staring blankly through the broken walls of roofless temples, stripped of their plates of gold and silver, defiled by man, beast and bird. On the



terraces where once a thousand elephants, splendid in gold and crimson harness, roared a salute to the ambassadors of the *Grand Monarque* and the Most High and Sovereign King of Spain, where the trumpets neighed, and the state drums boomed, we met nothing but a herd of wild ponies and a naked wild boy chasing them. *Fuit Ilium!*

Excavators are at work among the rubble and the trifling results of their labours (I know not what they expect to find; the Burmese raked the place with a moustache-comb, by all accounts) are to be seen—chips of carved stone, fragments of arms, legs and heads of images—piled up in unguarded heaps for anybody to take—providing they are dishonest enough. I said as much to Senhor A. J. da Cunha and he told me that he came there once with an Englishman who picked up a Buddha's hand and put it in his pocket as a souvenir. The pair went on to Saigon, where the Englishman was smitten in the foot with excruciating gout. Despite the heat, the Senhor very kindly mimicked the fellow's agony for my benefit, hopping about on one foot, nursing the other, delivering cracked falsetto squeals.

"By'm-by *cavalheiro* she get worse," said the Senhor. "Ai-ee! Oh-oo! So come he arrive at die. Ai-ee! *Terrivel!*"

He, Anunciacao Jaymé, was dispatched hell for leather back to Ayuthia to replace the hand. He did so and immediately the gout stopped and the Englishman recovered.

"*Milagroso*, heh? *Wonderbar?*" said the Senhor, who like most fluent linguists was apt to get his lingo mixed.

I thought it would have been still more miraculous if it had been a hand for a hand instead of a hand for a foot, and advised the Senhor to make it so next time



he told the tale—after all, it's the moral that matters. He professed to be shocked at my suggestion, protesting that nothing but the exact truth could issue from his pure lips, but from the thoughtful silence that followed I think he was turning the matter over in his mind and the next comer will get the revised version and be properly thrilled.

CHAPTER XXVI

FINIS

The Siamese are masters of the art of decorative camouflage. Day after day I passed the Pramane grounds and the funeral catafalque for the late king, Rama VI, seemed to be little further advanced. A few carpenters crawled listlessly about on an erection of rough lumber and matting, knocking in a tin-tack here and there. Others, equally unhurried, were putting up sheds and bamboo fences. I got quite worried about it and complained to a resident.

"They'll never be ready in time," said I.

"Won't they?" he retorted. "You see."

He was right. I went to the Pramane early on the morning of the ceremony and was astounded. The sheds had been magicked overnight into splendid pavilions. The central scaffolding had blossomed into a golden tower, reached by four wide flights of steps and crowned by a graceful *chedi*. Each of the base-stages was set round with angel statues, trees and seven-tiered umbrellas. The whole thing was taller than most church spires and shone forth in the morning sun like some fragment of Eldorado. Marvellous!

When I examined it closely next day I saw that the trees were imitation, the statues papier-mâché, and the shining gold crude gilt paper roughly pasted on. But no matter, the effect was magnificent and most cunningly contrived.

Huge crowds covered the Pramane, come from all parts of the kingdom. The predominant wear was



white—white jackets and white camisoles, a sea of them—with, here and there, a splash of mustard-yellow denoting a group of *talapoins*, fans in hand.

Guns boomed solemnly from the palace and the troops marched up and took station. The cavalry came first, lancers in blue bestriding inadequate ponies; then the field-guns, followed by infantry in white with red plumed helmets, in blue and khaki, carrying draped colours. They marched very well, seeing that most of them had never worn boots before. My companion told me that the boots were issued only on special occasions and returned to store immediately after. As it was, they did not go round, but the bootless were well hidden in the inner ranks. Most of the uniforms were vaguely familiar and gradually I began to identify their parentage. That tunic was copied from the Qth British lancers, this helmet from the Zth *Uhlanen*. Then, to my amazement, an officer rode up in the dress uniform of my own regiment, complete in every detail, except that the facings were green instead of scarlet. The whole show, so far, but that the actors were coffee-coloured, might have taken place in Europe. Even the Siamese National Anthem, played continuously by the military bands, was European, composed by a German!

I spoke my disappointment to my friend.

"Wait, idiot," said the knowing one. "Wait!"

Again he was right; there was nothing European about the items that followed. First came a party of men dressed in loose scarlet with tall clown caps, carrying side-drums and conch-shells. Then more scarlet clowns with jelly-bag caps dragging a tall pyramidal car, more ornate than any Barnum and Bailey bandwagon. High on the top, enthroned like Britannia in the old circus parades, sat the yellow-draped Prince-



THE DRAGON AND THE LOTUS



Primate of Siam, reading the Scriptures, while at his feet, on a lower stage, squatted a Brahmin, in white, with white patches stuck on his cheeks and on his head a tapering white fool's-cap as worn by penitents at an *auto da Fé*.

On each side of the car walked three milk-white stallion ponies, caparisoned in gold and silver. Followed a second car, higher and even more gorgeous than the first, carved with images and dragon-heads, painted and gilded; a towering Juggernaut, with the gold urn containing the king's body under a canopy at the top. Flanking it was a moving avenue of seven-tiered umbrellas and big lotus-leaf and elephant-tail fans and behind it walked the king's horses, driven with red reins and followed by grooms carrying bowls of grass.

The great car halted. A prostrate Brahmin was hoisted up on a lift and, bringing the sacred urn down with him, placed it on a gun-carriage. The military bands stopped playing, and to the whine of conch horns and the rumble of death-drums the urn was carried rapidly three times round the catafalque, the idea being—as in Blind-Man's Buff where the blindfolded is turned round thrice—that the deceased will be unable to find his way back to haunt the living. The urn was then set in place and the morning ceremony was over.

I went back to the Pramane in the afternoon and again in the evening. In the afternoon all four flights of steps were jammed with loyal subjects tossing small packets of combustibles under the remains of their late monarch, which to Western eyes appeared an odd way of expressing affection. The ground was littered with sightseeing parties camped out for the day, picnicking on the grass *en famille*. *Talapoins* lay stretched in sleep, umbrellas set like tents above them. Chinese cooks were there in force, with their movable restau-



FINIS



rants; vendors of sweetmeats, fruit, sugar-cane, ice-cream, paper favours and colored balloons. As at Hué, it had more the appearance of a fair than a funeral.

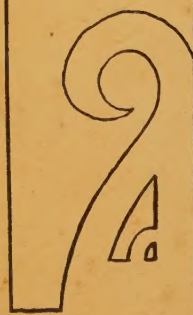
At nine in the evening the press was immense. A searchlight had been set at each corner of the enclosure, focusing on the tower. Princes and notables sat waiting in the pavilions. At ten the royal party arrived. The crimson curtains were drawn back, the golden outer urn removed, leaving an inner of plain copper.

His Majesty, King Prajadhipok, a slight boyish figure in a white military uniform, ran up the steps and set his brother's pyre alight. The flames leapt up around the urn in ravenous dragon tongues of amber and scarlet.

An hour later I stood on a high balcony and looked out over the dark tree-tops of the Pramane to where the tower, under its steady searchlights, still shone like a pillar of gold against the night. With memory's eyes I saw myself, a mere child, returning in a hansom-cab from a prize-fight in the East End of London, my companion an Oxford undergrad. At his behest, crossing Leicester Square, we picked up another undergrad, an Oriental. He sat on my knees all the way down the avenues of lamps that are Piccadilly and Knightsbridge, to Queens Gate, where we dropped him, a plump, agreeable fellow, with a pleasant, ready laugh. His remains were in that urn yonder, among the leaping dragon-tongues, a handful of grey ash.

FINIS

Indo-





China

